NFL PREVIEW

68 Pages of Scouting Reports /// Peter King's Super Bowl Pick: Steelers over Packers

Sports Illustrated

DOUBLE ISSUE

SEPTEMBER 6, 2010 | SI.COM



FALCONS QB MATT RYAN TAKES THE SNAP FROM TODD McCLURE

CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

SPREAD OFFENSES, BLITZ PACKAGES AND **WHY EVERY SPLIT SECOND COUNTS**

BY PETER KING



GMC | NFL

AN ENGINEER'S CHAMPIONSHIP RING.

INTRODUCING THE NEW SIERRA DENALI HD

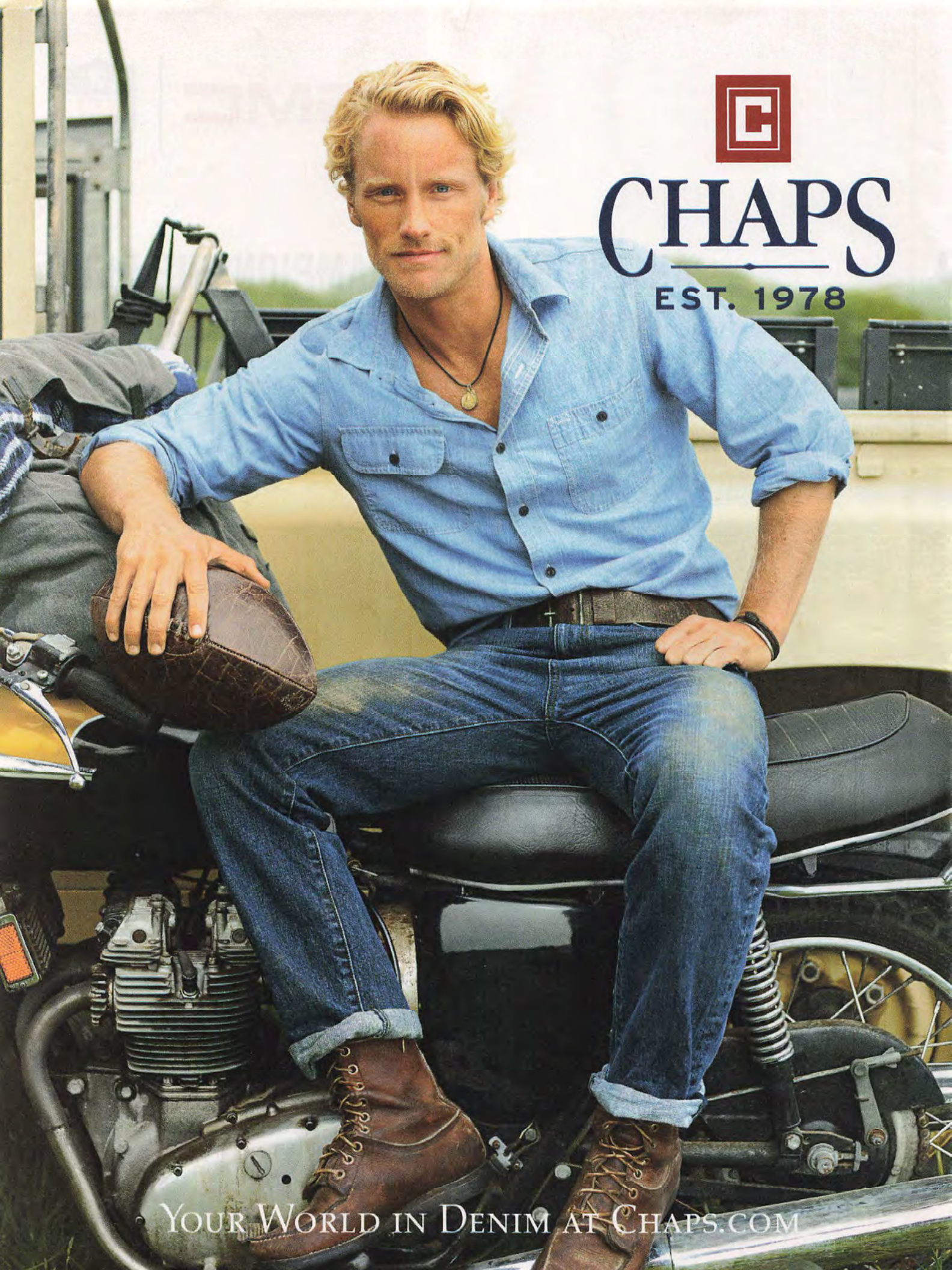


It offers 2,631 lbs of payload* and up to 15,600 lbs of fifth-wheel trailering ability. The newest member of the heavy-duty team isn't another pretty face. Like all champions, this one never quits. GMC, the official vehicle of the NFL. WE ARE PROFESSIONAL GRADE.**

GMC.COM/SIERRA

Requires available Duramax Diesel engine. *Maximum payload capacity includes weight of driver, passengers, optional equipment and cargo. **Maximum trailer ratings are calculated assuming a properly equipped base vehicle, plus driver. See dealer for details.

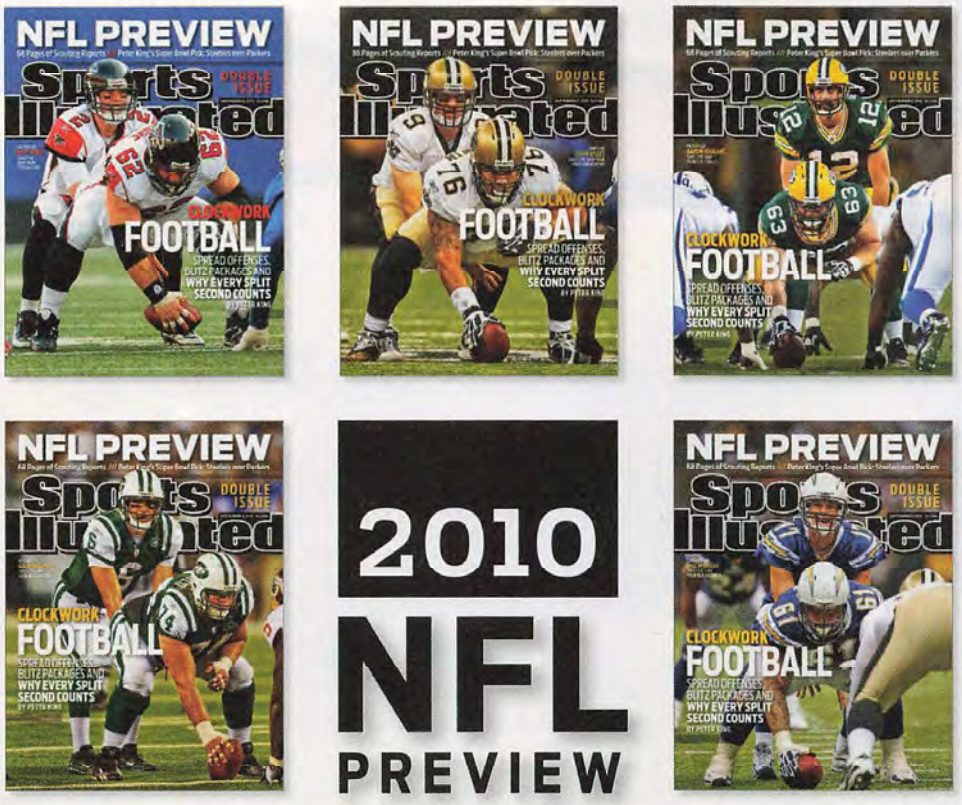
©2010 General Motors. All rights reserved. Denali® Duramax® GMC® Sierra® WE ARE PROFESSIONAL GRADE®
©2010 NFL Properties LLC. All NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League.


CHAPS
EST. 1978
YOUR WORLD IN DENIM AT CHAPS.COM

Sports Illustrated

September 6, 2010
Volume 113, No. 8

Lineup



2010 NFL PREVIEW

44 CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL
Tick, tick, tick. A quarterback has less than three seconds to make a play
by Peter King

58 JULIUS PEPPERS
Why the Bears placed a huge bet on the league's most athletic pass rusher
by Damon Hack

64 MARK SANCHEZ
The Jets believe in him, but to be a true star he must develop a QB's sixth sense
by Phil Taylor

70 PETER KING'S PICKS
How each team will finish, and who will win every playoff game, including Super Bowl XLV

74 SCOUTING REPORTS
SI breaks down all 32 teams, with key players, projected starters and analysis of each schedule

ON THE COVER Photographs by Bob Rosato (Chargers, Saints); John Biever (Packers); Rich Kane/Icon SMI (Falcons); Heinz Kluetmeier (Jets)
For the NFL Preview, SI has put out five regional covers

Departments

4 Leading Off
14 Letters
18 **Scorecard**
Sneak peek: Lombardi treads the boards
26 Faces in the Crowd
29 Just My Type
Peyton Manning on picks, sacks, stitches
by Dan Patrick
34 **Inside . . .**
- **The NBA**
The Spurs' latest coup
- **Baseball**
Toronto's hot bat
- **College Football**
A coach on the brink
- **Fantasy Football**
Camp breakouts

160 The Vault
Nebraska rolls, '83
164 Point After
Is 40 the new 65 for NFL alumni?
by Selena Roberts

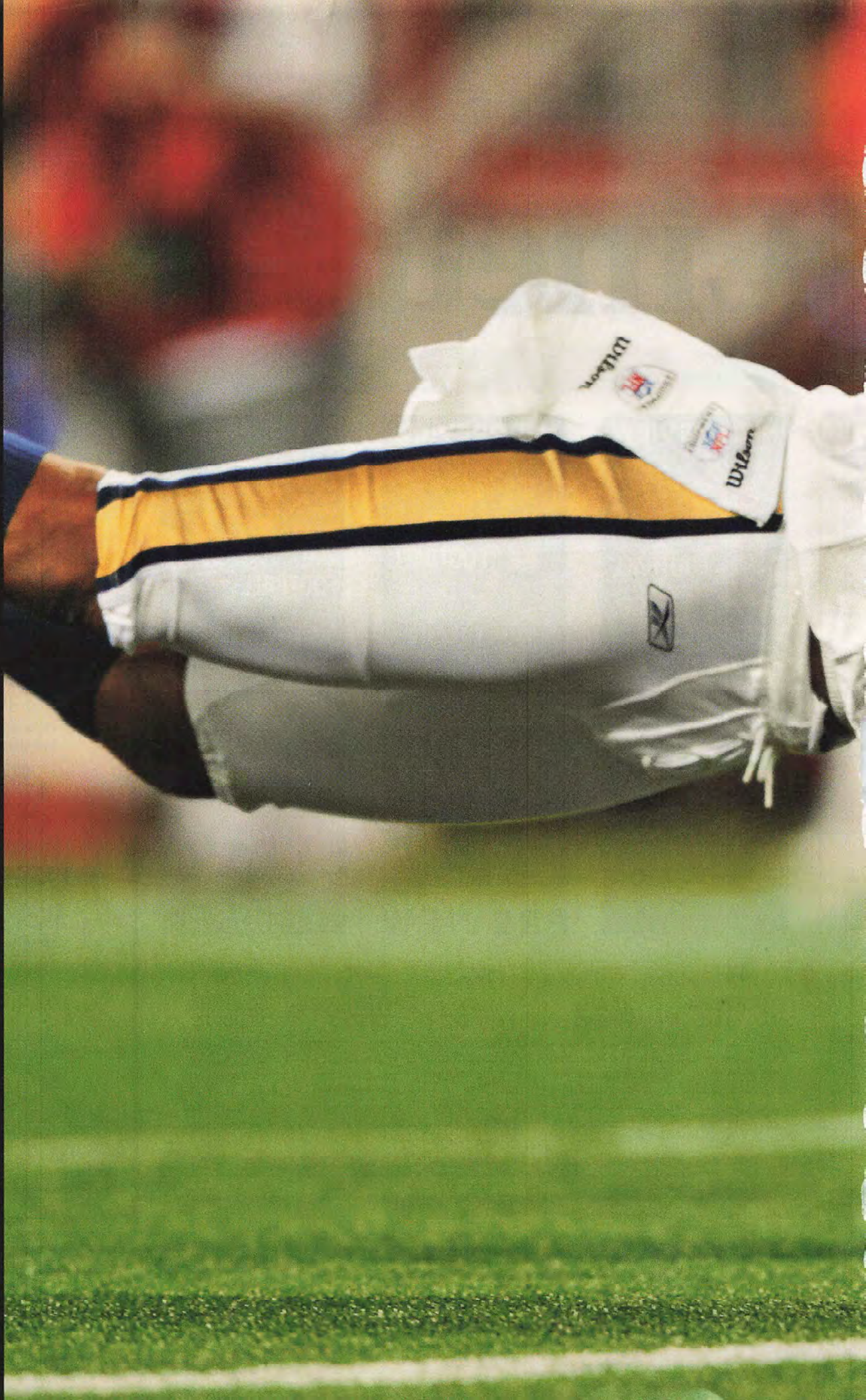


Jose Bautista's homer binge may be surprising, but it's no fluke.

DARREN CALABRESE/CP/AP (BAUTISTA)

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with extra issues in February and March, and two issues combined in July and at year end, by Time Inc. Principal Office: Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1393. Ann Moore, Chairman, CEO. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada addresses to: Postal Stn A, P.O. Box 4322, Toronto, ON, M5W 3G9. GST #122781974RT. U.S. Subscriptions: $89.04 for one year. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, Post Office Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2010 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC.

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.SI.com/customerservice You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602.

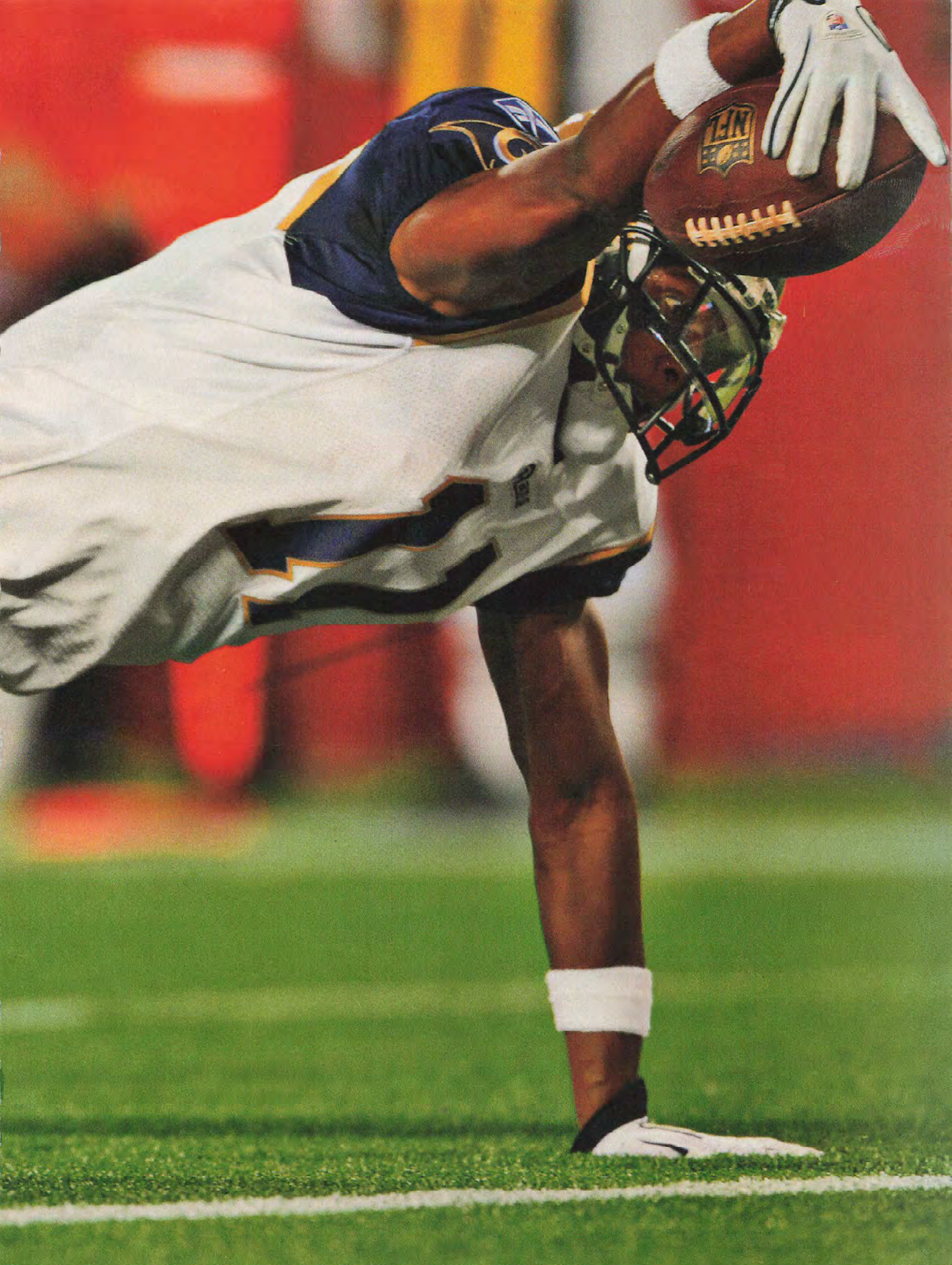


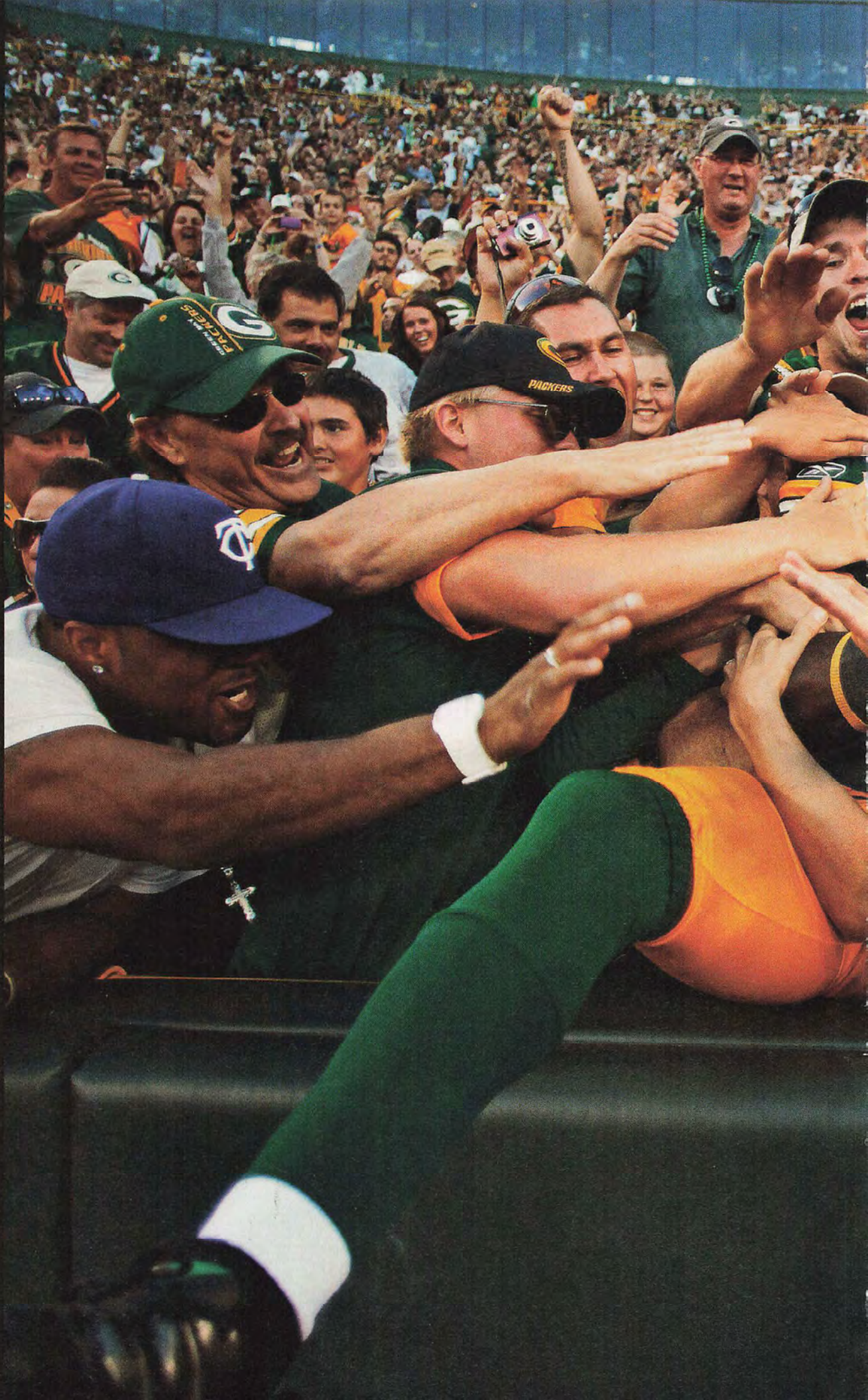
LEADING OFF

Six-Point Landing

Rams wide receiver Brandon Gibson dived for the end zone after catching a 20-yard pass from rookie quarterback Thaddeus Lewis during the third quarter of a preseason game against the Patriots in Foxborough, Mass., last Thursday. The score helped St. Louis win the first start by its other rookie QB, No. 1 draft pick Sam Bradford 36–35.

Photograph by **Damian Strohmeyer**





LEADING OFF

Driver's Seat

Packers wide receiver Donald Driver leaped into an ecstatic crowd at Green Bay's Lambeau Field after catching a six-yard touchdown pass from Aaron Rodgers during the first quarter of a preseason game against the Colts last Thursday. The home fans' high spirits never abated as the Packers dominated Indianapolis 59–24.

Photograph by **Morry Gash/AP**


Riddell
12



LEADING OFF

Push Pull

Jacob Hellman of the Bel Air Terps tried to escape the grasp of the Westminster Wildcats' Dimeon Wright during a nine-minute exhibition at halftime of a Giants-Ravens preseason game in Baltimore last Saturday. The two teams of Maryland eight- to 10-year-olds played to a 6–6 tie.

Photograph by **Simon Bruty**


ADAMS
WILDCATS

The Best Week Of the Year

by TERRY McDONELL

I thought, from that morning on, I would be scoring touchdowns . . . all my life and never be touched or tackled.
—JACK KEROUAC



What our brilliant and possibly only beatnik running back was feeling when he wrote those words was the exhilaration of the beginning of a new football season. It's tribal. We've all felt it. It's the optimism that comes when car-dealership-sized flags start flapping in every wind from San Diego to Foxborough and friendships left dormant since the Super Bowl are renewed, as the opening of the new NFL season unlocks a change in the pace of life. More beer is sold, fewer weddings are planned. It's obsession from the top down. A week from Sunday the White House television will be tuned to the Bears and the Lions at Soldier Field, while according to those rollicking trained-observers at *Politico* the rest of D.C. becomes balkanized. (Kelly's Irish Times is a Patriots bar; the Pour House a Steelers joint; the Rhino Bar and Pumphouse in G'town an Eagles hangout; the 51st State, down near GW, a big Giants-Jets-Bills mudfest, and so on.) Back in the day, our most shamed president, Richard Nixon, would keep his calendar clear on NFL Sundays and Redskins coach George Allen's phone number handy. Even liberals liked him for that. So too his most insightful nemesis, Hunter S. Thompson, would begin his day with a tumbler of Chivas and a call list two pages long. (Gambling may have been involved.) These are all very old tribes.

"Welcome to the NFL" has become business argot as a macho celebration of the league's almost stupefying success—the richest sports league in the world, an $8.5 billion business with tough, strategic leadership. (An executive familiar with the broadcasting deals surrounding the game played in London every year says that negotiating with the BBC is like "negotiating with Bambi.") On each of the five floors at NFL HQ, in Manhattan, a Countdown to Game Time clock tracks the days, hours, minutes, seconds and tenths of a second to the Saints-Vikings game leading in to the opening weekend. Tick, tock.

That Thursday before the game, New Orleans will have its second Mardi Gras–style NFL parade in seven months with floats representing all 16 Week 1 matchups, as part of a "football and music festival" full up with politicians, chefs, musicians and ex-NFL players bent on throwing a party for the whole town, not just for those upstanding citizens of Who Dat nation with reserved Superdome seats. In his classic *On the Road*, Kerouac wrote about his love of what he called "the muds" of New Orleans, where he found "the children of the American bop night." If he could make the scene at the parade (good luck scoring a ticket to the game), he'd find himself with fans still fighting through the economic and bureaucratic hangover of Katrina, sad-eyed from watching the biggest accidental spill in the history of the Gulf wash ashore, yet absolutely certain that the Saints were already on their way to Super Bowl XLV next February at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington.

Coming from the hard dirt sandlots of Lowell, Mass., where he once scored nine touchdowns in a single game, Kerouac the halfback learned the optimism that he rode to a football scholarship to Columbia, and later took on the road. "Nothing behind me, everything ahead of me . . ." he wrote. He would have loved the Saints. □

MEL LEVINE

Ask your doctor if SYMBICORT is right for you.

YOU COULD GET YOUR FIRST PRESCRIPTION OF SYMBICORT FOR FREE.†

You may also get copay savings for up to a year. Find out more at MySymbicort.com/card or call 1-877-318-0726.



†Subject to eligibility rules. Restrictions apply.

Please see Important Safety Information about SYMBICORT on the following pages, and discuss with your doctor.

SYMBICORT is a registered trademark of the AstraZeneca group of companies.
©2010 AstraZeneca LP.
All rights reserved. 301866 7/10

Symbicort®
(budesonide/formoterol fumarate dihydrate)
Inhalation Aerosol

SYMBICORT is for asthma that is not well controlled on a long-term asthma medicine, or when disease severity warrants

My asthma... under control with the help of SYMBICORT.

When my symptoms came back, my doctor and I chose SYMBICORT to help improve my lung function.



SYMBICORT helps me breathe better all day, starting within 15 minutes.* It won't replace a rescue inhaler for sudden symptoms. Unlike most other asthma control medicines, SYMBICORT combines two medicines to help control inflammation and constriction.

* Your results may vary.

Ask your doctor if SYMBICORT is a good choice for you.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SYMBICORT

Important Safety Information About SYMBICORT for Asthma

SYMBICORT contains formoterol, a long-acting beta$_2$-adrenergic agonist (LABA). LABA medicines such as formoterol increase the risk of death from asthma problems. It is not known whether budesonide, the other medicine in SYMBICORT, reduces the risk of death from asthma problems seen with formoterol.

SYMBICORT should be used only if your healthcare provider decides that your asthma is not well controlled with a long-term asthma control medicine, such as an inhaled corticosteroid, or that your asthma is severe enough to begin treatment with SYMBICORT.

If you are taking SYMBICORT, see your healthcare provider if your asthma does not improve or gets worse. It is important that your healthcare provider assess your asthma control on a regular basis. Your doctor will decide if it is possible for you to stop taking SYMBICORT and start taking a long-term asthma control medicine without loss of asthma control.

SYMBICORT does not replace rescue inhalers for sudden asthma symptoms.

Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all your health conditions, including heart conditions or high blood pressure, and all medicines you may be taking. Some patients taking SYMBICORT may experience increased blood pressure, heart rate, or change in heart rhythm.

Do not use SYMBICORT more often than prescribed. While taking SYMBICORT, never use another medicine containing a LABA for any reason. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if any of your other medicines are LABA medicines, as using too much LABA may cause chest pain, increase in blood pressure, fast and irregular heartbeat, headache, tremor, and nervousness.

Patients taking SYMBICORT

- may experience serious allergic reactions including rash, hives, swelling of the face, mouth and tongue, and breathing problems.
- may have a higher chance of infection. Tell your healthcare provider immediately if you think you are exposed to infections such as chicken pox or measles, or if you have any signs of infection.
- may experience an increase in wheezing right after taking SYMBICORT, eye problems including glaucoma and cataracts, decreases in bone mineral density, swelling of blood vessels, decrease in blood potassium and increase in blood sugar levels.

If you are switching to SYMBICORT from an oral corticosteroid, follow your healthcare provider's instructions to avoid serious health risks when you stop using oral corticosteroids.

Children and adolescents who take LABA medicines may have an increased risk of being hospitalized for asthma problems.

Common side effects include nose and throat irritation, headache, upper respiratory tract infection, sore throat, sinusitis, stomach discomfort, flu, back pain, nasal congestion, vomiting, and thrush in the mouth and throat.

Approved Uses for SYMBICORT for Asthma

SYMBICORT is used to control and prevent symptoms of asthma in adults and children ages 12 and older. SYMBICORT is not for patients who have sudden asthma symptoms.

Please see Important Product Information on adjacent page and discuss with your doctor.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

For more information, call 1-888-312-0792 or go to MySymbicort.com/save

If you're without prescription coverage and can't afford your medication, AstraZeneca may be able to help. For more information, please visit www.astrazeneca-us.com

Symbicort®
(budesonide/formoterol fumarate dihydrate)
Inhalation Aerosol

AstraZeneca

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SYMBICORT

Please read this summary carefully and then ask your doctor about SYMBICORT.

No advertisement can provide all the information needed to determine if a drug is right for you or take the place of careful discussions with your health care provider. Only your health care provider has the training to weigh the risks and benefits of a prescription drug.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SYMBICORT?

People with asthma who take long-acting beta$_2$-agonist (LABA) medicines, such as formoterol (one of the medicines in SYMBICORT), have an increased risk of death from asthma problems. It is not known whether budesonide, the other medicine in SYMBICORT, reduces the risk of death from asthma problems seen with formoterol.

SYMBICORT should be used only if your health care provider decides that your asthma is not well controlled with a long-term asthma control medicine, such as an inhaled corticosteroid, or that your asthma is severe enough to begin treatment with SYMBICORT. Talk with your health care provider about this risk and the benefits of treating your asthma with SYMBICORT.

If you are taking SYMBICORT, see your health care provider if your asthma does not improve or gets worse. It is important that your health care provider assess your asthma control on a regular basis. Your doctor will decide if it is possible for you to stop taking SYMBICORT and start taking a long-term asthma control medicine without loss of asthma control.

Get emergency medical care if:

- breathing problems worsen quickly, and
- you use your rescue inhaler medicine, but it does not relieve your breathing problems.

Children and adolescents who take LABA medicines may be at increased risk of being hospitalized for asthma problems.

WHAT IS SYMBICORT?

SYMBICORT is an inhaled prescription medicine used for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). It contains two medicines:

- Budesonide (the same medicine found in Pulmicort Flexhaler™, an inhaled corticosteroid). Inhaled corticosteroids help to decrease inflammation in the lungs. Inflammation in the lungs can lead to asthma symptoms
- Formoterol (the same medicine found in Foradil® Aerolizer®). LABA medicines are used in patients with COPD and asthma to help the muscles in the airways of your lungs stay relaxed to prevent asthma symptoms, such as wheezing and shortness of breath. These symptoms can happen when the muscles in the airways tighten. This makes it hard to breathe, which, in severe cases, can cause breathing to stop completely if not treated right away

SYMBICORT is used for asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease as follows:

Asthma

SYMBICORT is used to control symptoms of asthma and prevent symptoms such as wheezing in adults and children ages 12 and older.

Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease

COPD is a chronic lung disease that includes chronic bronchitis, emphysema, or both. SYMBICORT 160/4.5 mcg is used long term, two times each day, to help improve lung function for better breathing in adults with COPD.

WHO SHOULD NOT USE SYMBICORT?

Do not use SYMBICORT to treat sudden severe symptoms of asthma or COPD or if you are allergic to any of the ingredients in SYMBICORT.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER BEFORE USING SYMBICORT?

Tell your health care provider about all of your health conditions, including if you:

- have heart problems
- have high blood pressure
- have seizures
- have thyroid problems
- have diabetes
- have liver problems
- have osteoporosis
- have an immune system problem
- have eye problems such as increased pressure in the eye, glaucoma, or cataracts
- are allergic to any medicines
- are exposed to chicken pox or measles
- **are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.** It is not known if SYMBICORT may harm your unborn baby
- **are breast-feeding.** Budesonide, one of the active ingredients in SYMBICORT, passes into breast milk. You and your health care provider should decide if you will take SYMBICORT while breast-feeding

Tell your health care provider about all the medicines you take including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. SYMBICORT and certain other medicines may interact with each other and can cause serious side effects. Know all the medicines you take. Keep a list and show it to your health care provider and pharmacist each time you get a new medicine.

HOW DO I USE SYMBICORT?

Do not use SYMBICORT unless your health care provider has taught you and you understand everything. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if you have any questions.

Use SYMBICORT exactly as prescribed. **Do not use SYMBICORT more often than prescribed.** SYMBICORT comes in two strengths for asthma: 80/4.5 mcg and 160/4.5 mcg. Your health care provider will prescribe the strength that is best for you. SYMBICORT 160/4.5 mcg is the approved dosage for COPD.

- SYMBICORT should be taken every day as 2 puffs in the morning and 2 puffs in the evening.
- Rinse your mouth with water and spit the water out after each dose (2 puffs) of SYMBICORT. This will help lessen the chance of getting a fungus infection (thrush) in the mouth and throat.
- Do not spray SYMBICORT in your eyes. If you accidentally get SYMBICORT in your eyes, rinse your eyes with water. If redness or irritation persists, call your health care provider.
- Do not change or stop any medicines used to control or treat your breathing problems. Your health care provider will change your medicines as needed
- **While you are using SYMBICORT 2 times each day, do not use other medicines that contain a long-acting beta$_2$-agonist (LABA) for any reason. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if any of your other medicines are LABA medicines.**
- SYMBICORT does not relieve sudden symptoms. Always have a rescue inhaler medicine with you to treat sudden symptoms. If you do not have a rescue inhaler, call your health care provider to have one prescribed for you.

Call your health care provider or get medical care right away if:

- your breathing problems worsen with SYMBICORT
- you need to use your rescue inhaler medicine more often than usual
- your rescue inhaler does not work as well for you at relieving symptoms
- you need to use 4 or more inhalations of your rescue inhaler medicine for 2 or more days in a row
- you use one whole canister of your rescue inhaler medicine in 8 weeks' time
- your peak flow meter results decrease. Your health care provider will tell you the numbers that are right for you
- your symptoms do not improve after using SYMBICORT regularly for 1 week

WHAT MEDICATIONS SHOULD I NOT TAKE WHEN USING SYMBICORT?

While you are using SYMBICORT, do not use other medicines that contain a long-acting beta$_2$-agonist (LABA) for any reason, such as:

- Serevent® Diskus® (salmeterol xinafoate inhalation powder)
- Advair Diskus® or Advair® HFA (fluticasone propionate and salmeterol)
- Formoterol-containing products such as Foradil Aerolizer, Brovana®, or Perforomist®

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS WITH SYMBICORT?

SYMBICORT can cause serious side effects.

- Increased risk of pneumonia and other lower respiratory tract infections if you have COPD. Call your health care provider if you notice any of these symptoms: increase in mucus production, change in mucus color, fever, chills, increased cough, increased breathing problems
- Serious allergic reactions including rash; hives; swelling of the face, mouth and tongue; and breathing problems. Call your health care provider or get emergency care if you get any of these symptoms
- Immune system effects and a higher chance for infections
- Adrenal insufficiency–a condition in which the adrenal glands do not make enough steroid hormones
- Cardiovascular and central nervous system effects of LABAs, such as chest pain, increased blood pressure, fast or irregular heartbeat, tremor, or nervousness
- Increased wheezing right after taking SYMBICORT
- Eye problems, including glaucoma and cataracts. You should have regular eye exams while using SYMBICORT
- Osteoporosis. People at risk for increased bone loss may have a greater risk with SYMBICORT
- Slowed growth in children. As a result, growth should be carefully monitored
- Swelling of your blood vessels. This can happen in people with asthma
- Decreases in blood potassium levels and increases in blood sugar levels

WHAT ARE COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF SYMBICORT?

Patients with Asthma

Sore throat, headache, upper respiratory tract infection, thrush in the mouth and throat

Patients with COPD

Thrush in the mouth and throat

These are not all the side effects with SYMBICORT. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist for more information.

NOTE: This summary provides important information about SYMBICORT. For more information, please ask your doctor or health care provider.

SYMBICORT is a registered trademark of the AstraZeneca group of companies. Other brands mentioned are trademarks of their respective owners and are not trademarks of the AstraZeneca group of companies. The makers of these brands are not affiliated with and do not endorse AstraZeneca or its products.

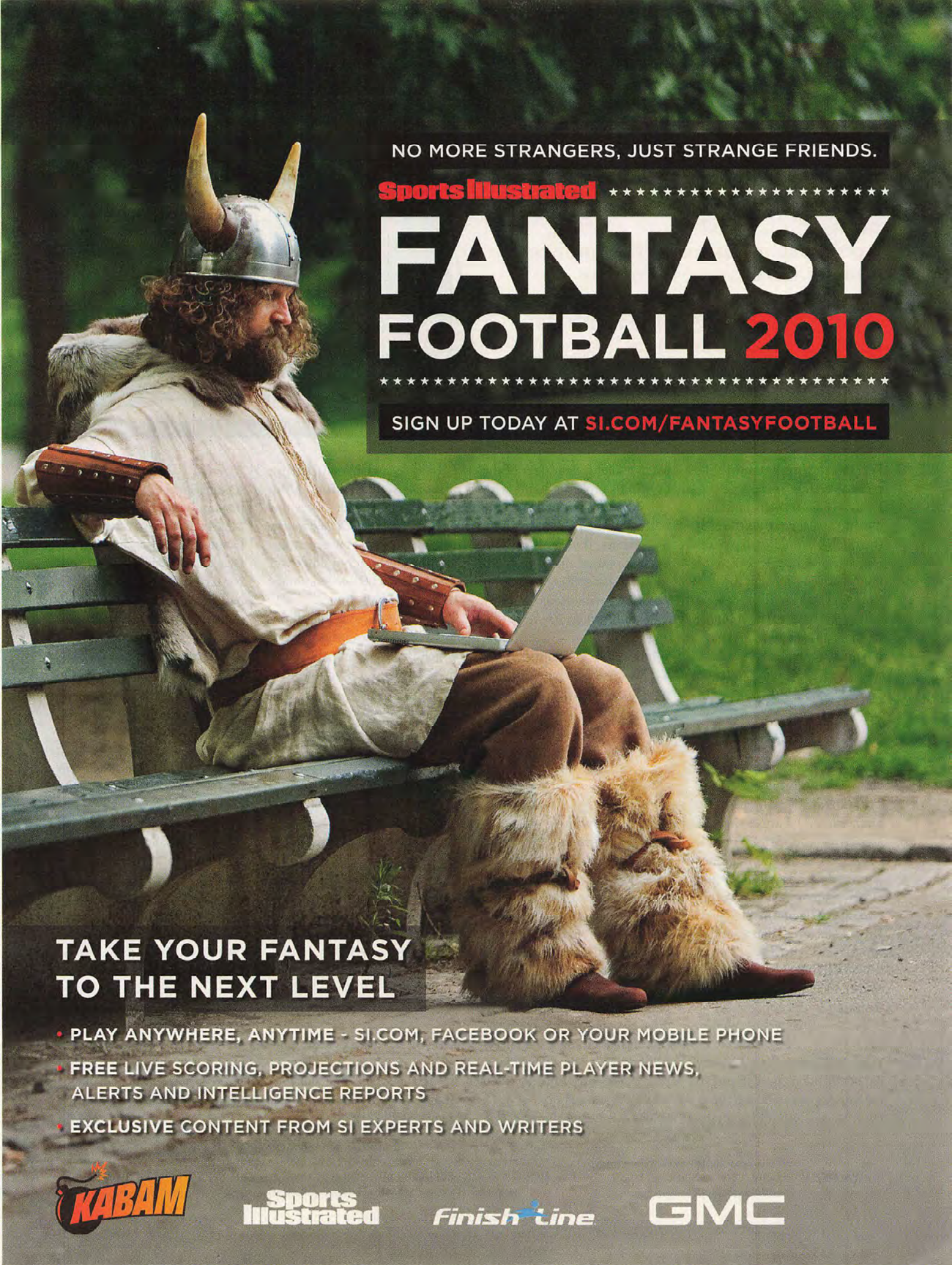
© 2010 AstraZeneca LP. All rights reserved.

Manufactured for: AstraZeneca LP, Wilmington, DE 19850
By: AstraZeneca AB, Dunkerque, France Product of France
Rev 6/10 303634

Visit **www.MySymbicort.com**
Or, call **1-866-SYMBICORT**

Symbicort®
(budesonide/formoterol fumarate dihydrate)
Inhalation Aerosol

AstraZeneca


NO MORE STRANGERS, JUST STRANGE FRIENDS.
Sports Illustrated
FANTASY
FOOTBALL 2010
SIGN UP TODAY AT SI.COM/FANTASYFOOTBALL
TAKE YOUR FANTASY
TO THE NEXT LEVEL
• PLAY ANYWHERE, ANYTIME - SI.COM, FACEBOOK OR YOUR MOBILE PHONE
• FREE LIVE SCORING, PROJECTIONS AND REAL-TIME PLAYER NEWS, ALERTS AND INTELLIGENCE REPORTS
• EXCLUSIVE CONTENT FROM SI EXPERTS AND WRITERS
KABAM
Sports Illustrated
Finish Line
GMC

Letters

Bruce Schoenfeld's article captured the romantic essence of a lost art in baseball. I wish more writers would pay attention to the nuances and details of sports. To hear players speak of the "mystical" nature of stealing home reminds us all that there is something still very pure about this game.

Chris Lang, Bethlehem, Pa.



While reading Schoenfeld's piece (*Stealing Home*, Aug. 16), I felt as though I were standing on third base waiting to see if the pitcher would foolishly revert to his windup. I recalled the flow of adrenaline and the way time slows down until the next delivery. Thanks for conjuring up those goose bumps and making me feel like I was 17 again.

Joshua R. Smith
Taneytown, Md.

Schoenfeld contends that Grady Sizemore's steal of home in 2005 proved to be of only aesthetic value for the Indians because Travis Hafner homered two pitches later. I'd argue that the steal was responsible for two runs scoring. Each pitch does not occur in a vacuum. Would Hafner have seen the same two pitches from the Blue Jays' Dustin McGowan had Sizemore remained at third base? Also, it's very likely Sizemore's steal caused McGowan to lose focus, resulting in the gopher ball.

Greg Nelson, Duluth

I was disappointed that this story did not mention one of the greatest home plate thefts of all time. On Aug. 22, 1982, third-string catcher Glenn Brummer of the Cardinals broke for home with two outs and two strikes in the bottom of the 12th inning for a 5–4 win over the Giants. I was in Busch Stadium that day, and it was the most exciting sports play I have ever witnessed.

Dan Eichholz, Rochester, Ill.

What about Ty Cobb and his 54 career steals of home, including a high of eight in a single year (1912)?

Marc Gullickson
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Bucking the Broncos



Your cover photo brings glaring attention to an advantage shrewdly employed by the Broncos at Boise State for their home games (College Football Preview, Aug. 16). Imagine a night game in Boise, blue players on a blue field, along with a blue background from the fans and the blue perimeter padding. How do you find the Boise running back if you're the safety? All that's missing is a blue football. Maybe coach Chris Petersen will try that this year.

W. Gray Grieve, Eugene, Ore.

I disagree with your rating of Boise State as No. 3 in the country. The Broncos were undefeated last year, ranked fourth in some polls and have great returning starters, but don't you think their schedule has something to do with their success? Their soft WAC schedule allows them to rest important players, which makes it easier for them to be successful in late-season games.

Patrick J. Renzelman
Sheboygan, Wis.

I was excited to see your projection for Kansas State. I noticed, however, that you predicted both Kansas State and Central Florida to go undefeated in out-of-conference play, which can't happen since they play each other on Sept. 25 in Manhattan. So, who do you think will win?

Michael Parker
Westmoreland, Kans.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Central Florida's conference record should have been listed at 6–2, not 4–4. SI predicts that K-State will win their matchup.

Misbehavior

As a high school teacher I was disappointed that your Aug. 16 issue included two references to hazing. SI describes a picture of Dolphins defensive tackle Travis Ivey shouldering his teammates pads in the hot sun as a "good-natured rookie hazing ritual," (LEADING OFF), and there was also a picture of Tim Tebow, who had been "scalped in rookie hazing" (SCORECARD). SI portrays these acts as funny and to be expected. Our kids won't learn until we lead by example.

Nancy Urner-Berry
Simsbury, Conn.

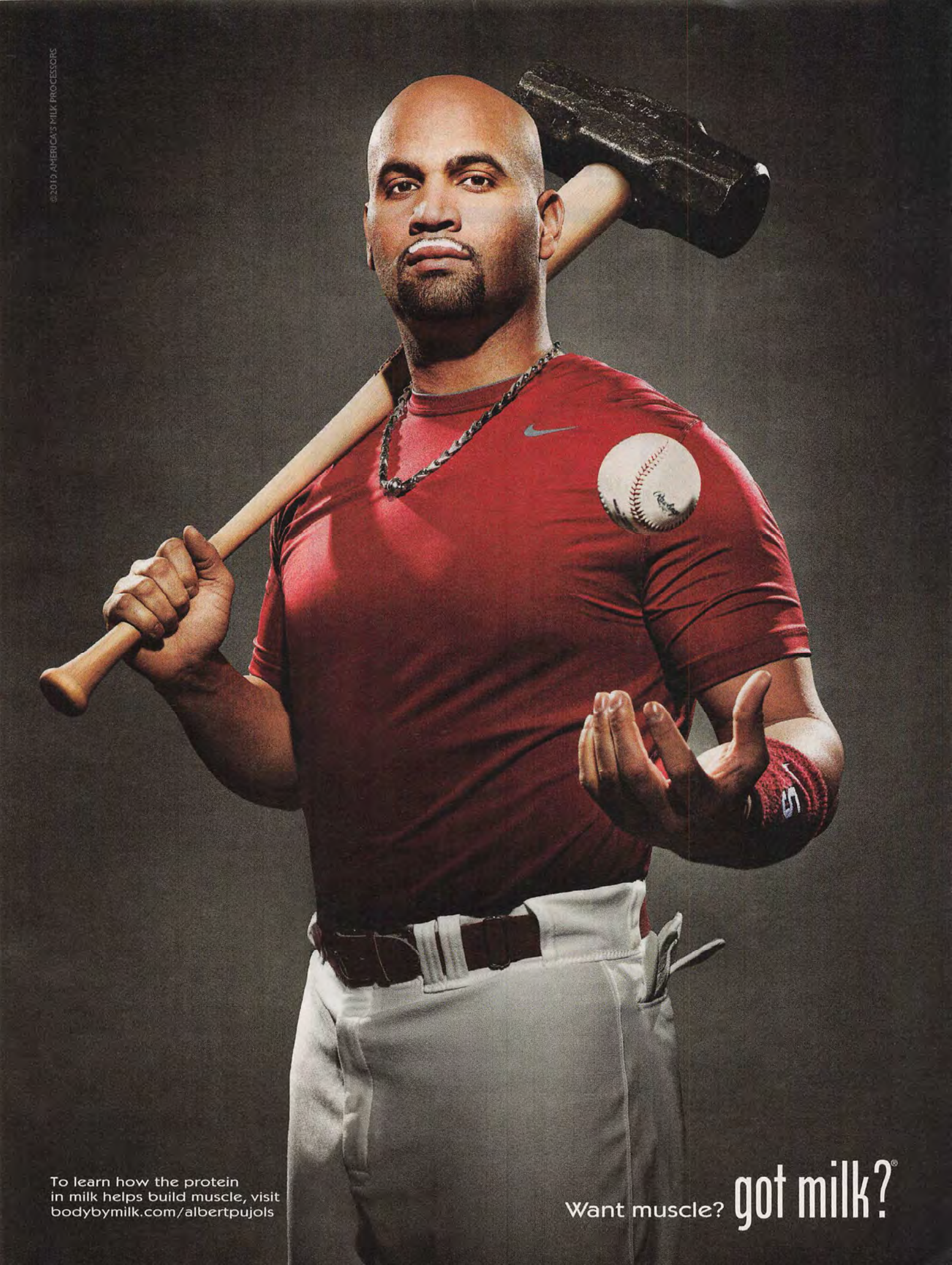
Not Having a Ball

Having watched a ballhawk scramble to grab 10 or more batting practice balls in the rightfield porch of Camden Yards, mostly at the expense of kids trying to catch one souvenir (POINT AFTER, Aug. 16), I would like to see the ushers duct-tape these guys to their seats instead of letting them terrorize normal fans. I'm glad Phil Taylor found one ballhawk who donates his proceeds to charity, but the vast majority are selfish opportunists trying to make a buck.

Rick Hanna, Great Falls, Va.

PETER READ MILLER (CCVER)

Contact SI | **LETTERS** E-mail SI at letters@SI.timeinc.com or fax SI at 212-467-2417. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for clarity and space. **CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS** For 24/7 service, go to SI.com/customerservice. Call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602. To purchase reprints of SI covers, go to SIcovers.com. **ADVERTISING** For ad rates, an editorial calendar or a media kit, e-mail SI at SIpubqueries@timeinc.com.


©2010 AMERICA'S MILK PROCESSORS
To learn how the protein
in milk helps build muscle, visit
bodybymilk.com/albertpujols
Want muscle? got milk?®

CANON PRESENTS **GETTING THE SHOT**

Timing is Everything



Felix Jones, Dallas Cowboys vs. San Diego Chargers, 12/13/09
Shot with Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, EF 400mm f/2.8L IS USM, at 1/2656 f/2.8

NFL PLAYERS

SI photographer Peter Read Miller has been covering the NFL for 37 years.

Football action is fast and often unpredictable. How do you capture a game's most crucial moments?
The first thing is to be able to anticipate. You need some knowledge of the teams' offensive and defensive styles and their key players. The more you know, the better the odds you'll be in the right place at the right time. Equipment plays a big part too. You need good autofocus, high ISO capability, a good high-speed motor driver. So even if you're shooting from a difficult position or the light's low, you can trust the camera will come through with a sharp image.

Do you have a preference on where you set up to shoot?
I really like shooting from the end zone. You get a much better sense of how a play unfolds. Most passing offenses rely on crossing patterns, hooks and slants these days, so even when the action's moving away from me, there's a good chance I can capture a receiver turning back to the quarterback. Plus, I can see the play unfolding from a QB's point of view.

Why do you love covering football so much?
I like having the freedom to follow my instincts. In other sports, you're locked into one shooting position. But in football, you can move around the sidelines or head to the end zone. Trying to read the action and styles of play makes for a challenging decision-making process: What's going to happen? Where's the best spot to shoot from? You have all these options, every play.



BEHIND THE LENS:
SI PHOTOGRAPHER
Peter Read Miller

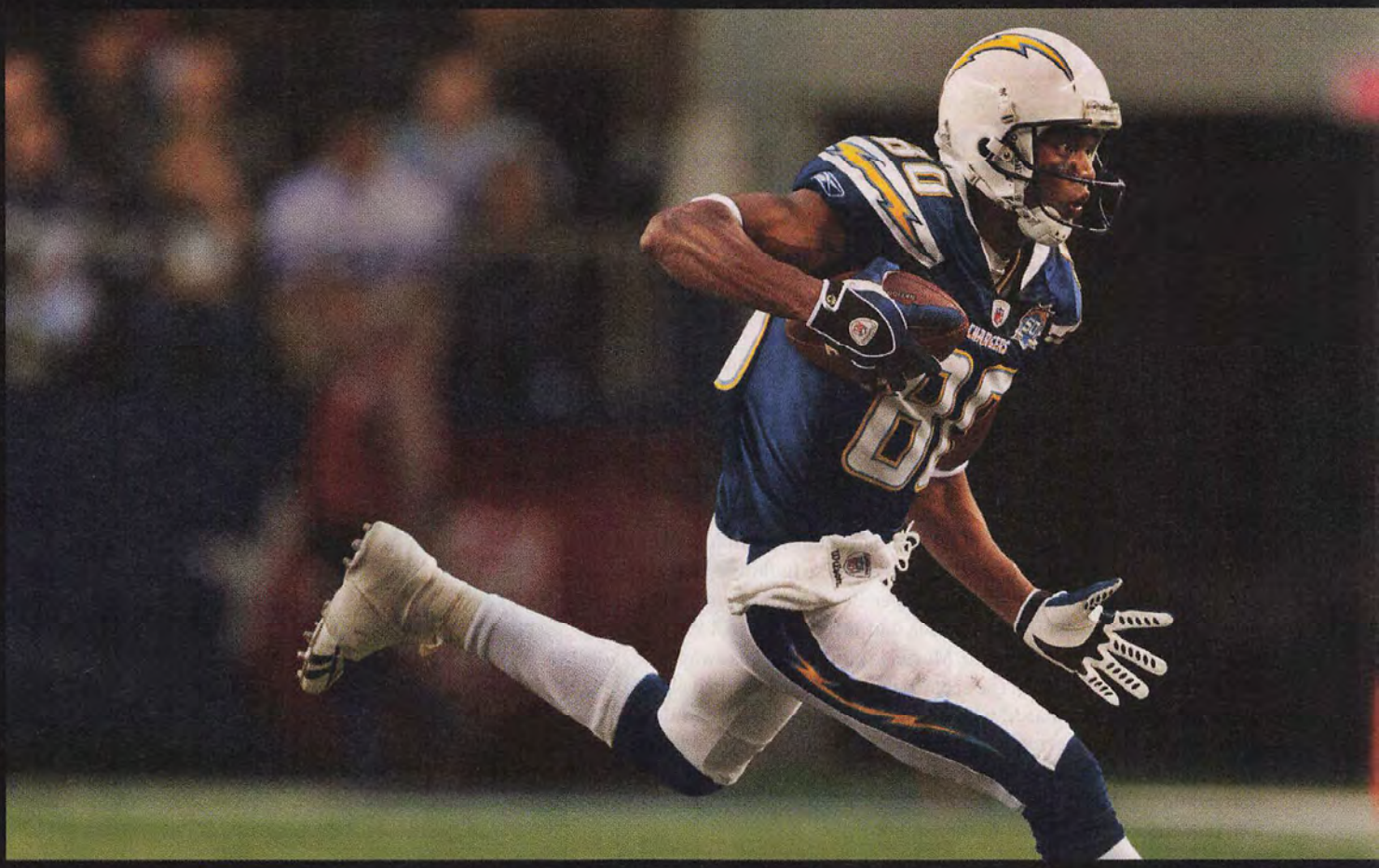
©2010 Time Inc.

The linemen couldn't catch me.

The linebacker still can't catch his breath.

The cornerback wasn't even close.

The safety only saw the back of my jersey.



Very impressive, Mr. Miller.



Photographer Peter Read Miller caught Malcom Floyd, in sharp focus, with the lightning-fast EOS-1D Mark IV. It shoots up to 10 frames per second with a completely redesigned AF tracking system that can keep up with anything. Go to usa.canon.com/dlc to learn more about the NFL's new sideline MVP. Inspired. By Canon.

NFL PLAYERS

NFL Official Camera of the NFL

Canon

imageANYWARE

©2010 Peter Read Miller, Canon Explorer of Light ©2010 Canon U.S.A., Inc. Canon and EOS are registered trademarks of Canon Inc. in the United States. IMAGEANYWARE is a trademark of Canon. All rights reserved. © 2010 NFL Properties LLC. Team names/logos/indicia are trademarks of the teams indicated. All other NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League. NFL PLAYERS is a trademark of National Football League Players Incorporated.

Edited by
DICK FRIEDMAN
AND
ADAM DUERSON

Scorecard

EXCLUSIVE SNEAK PREVIEW:
***LOMBARDI* ON BROADWAY**

Enter Power Sweep, Stage Right

In a pivotal scene from the upcoming drama, Vince Lombardi shows his Packers the play that will make them the first Super Bowl dynasty



Lombardi. The very name tingles with dramatic possibility, which will be realized on Broadway next month. Based on *When Pride Still Mattered*, David Maraniss's 2000 best seller, and written by Eric Simonson, a member of Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company, *Lombardi* depicts the on-field triumphs of the feared-yet-beloved Packers coach who remains so hallowed that his name is on the trophy given to the Super Bowl champions. In the title role is Dan Lauria (cantankerous dad Jack Arnold in TV's *The Wonder Years*); his troubled wife, Marie, is played by Broadway and TV veteran Judith Light. In the scene below, provided exclusively to SI, it is 1959 and Lombardi, who has just taken over in Green Bay, is having his first meeting with running backs Paul Hornung and Jim Taylor, to whom he begins detailing the power sweep, the play that would become the cornerstone of the Packers' dynasty and the two players' eventual ticket to the Hall of Fame.

Lombardi's office; Lombardi, followed by Hornung and Taylor, both in street clothes.

LOMBARDI
Come in, boys.

HORNUNG
Hello, Coach—
(Taylor grunts.)

LOMBARDI
How'd I do out there, fellas?

HORNUNG
Well, I tell you, Mr. Lombardi, you got their attention.

LOMBARDI
They could have walked out at once for all I knew. . . . I did not expect either of you till three days from now.

HORNUNG
Yes, sir.

LOMBARDI
Was there some sort of confusion with the dates? You're here early.

HORNUNG
Just a day or two.

LOMBARDI *(Barks.)*
Three days! How come?! This camp right now is for rookies and walk-ons only. What in the hell you hanging around camp for?!

HORNUNG
Well, sir—

LOMBARDI
That is not a question, Mister. If you come around camp, you come to work out, not to stand around and watch or sit with the others during lunch to make conversation. That is what we call a distraction. Why are you here?!
(He waits.)

That's actually a real question. Answer.

HORNUNG
Me and a couple of the boys, we were. . . .

LOMBARDI
What?! You were what?!

HORNUNG
Nothing.

LOMBARDI
Were you thinking you could get a head start on your bar hopping?

HORNUNG
No, sir.

LOMBARDI
Do not lie to me, Paul Hornung! You were spotted till all hours of the night at a place called Bucky's Beanery. This establishment is off-limits. I've got a list—
(Picks up a piece of paper from his desk.)

I've got a list here of all the bars and restaurants you are never, ever allowed to frequent again, and if I catch you there, you will be fined. You understand?

HORNUNG
Yes, sir.

LOMBARDI
Jim, why are you here early?

TAYLOR
I messed up on my calendar dates.

LOMBARDI
(After a beat.)
O.K. Both of you owe me 50 dollars.

ILLUSTRATION BY DARROW

TAYLOR
What for?!
LOMBARDI
You missed curfew.
TAYLOR
I didn't go out drinking.
LOMBARDI
Yet you weren't in your bed by 10.
HORNUNG
I thought curfew didn't start till Tuesday.
LOMBARDI
Mister, curfew started the day you showed up to camp! There is going to be a new way of doing things around here. You understand?
TAYLOR/HORNUNG
Yes, sir.
LOMBARDI
Now. While I got you here, we might as well make it worth our time. Tomorrow you are going to suit up and work out with the rest of the team. Jim, you are the starting fullback. That is not going to change. Paul, the previous coach had you playing practically every position on the field.
HORNUNG
Yes, sir.
LOMBARDI
From quarterback to running back and placekicker. Safety, punt and kickoff returns.
HORNUNG
Yup.
LOMBARDI
How do you feel about that?
HORNUNG
When you put it that way, Coach, it makes me feel kind of tired.
LOMBARDI
Of course it does, because you can't do it. Nobody can. Did you like losing?
HORNUNG
Nobody likes losing.
LOMBARDI
That is my point exactly. I want you to know one thing, Paul Hornung, you won't have to worry about playing five positions anymore. You are my left halfback. You are my Frank Gifford. You're either going to be my left halfback, or you're not going to make it in pro football, you understand?
HORNUNG
Yes, sir.
LOMBARDI
Now. Every team has a certain play that is theirs, and if they are good enough at running it, then there is no team that can stop it. Ours is the Power Sweep, we call it forty-nine, and you two are the cornerstones of that play. Jim, you and Paul here are going to be my thunder and lightning. You two are the engine that drives this team to victory.
(Goes to the chalkboard. Now he is speaking to the entire team.)
And this play, gentlemen, will be our bread and butter.
(MORE)
(Diagrams the play. Film and still images wash over the set.)
The offensive end takes an open position exactly nine feet from this tackle. The tackle, Jerry Kramer, is wider than usual, for greater latitude to pull left or right. Then you, [Fred]-Thurston—you may also break inside or outside, depending on how the play has broken. We create a seal here and a seal here and Jim Taylor, or Paul Hornung, as soon as you get the ball, you follow that blocker, and you run . . . in . . . the . . . alley! You run to daylight! Wherever it shows. Inside the defensive tackle, inside the defensive end, outside the defensive linebacker. You run to daylight. Forty-nine. And this play can break any one of those three places. But ultimately, on this one play we have a hundred different options. Each man must read the defense as it happens and block according to his discretion. It's up to the team to decide which way it goes, each player making split-second decisions in concert. This is our signature play. This is the play that we must make go. Every team in the league is going to know we're going to run this play, and no matter how hard they try to stop us, they won't. Because they can't! And we will run it again and again and again!
(Lights shift back to Hornung)
HORNUNG
That season we went from 1-10-1 to 7–5. You want to understand Coach, you watch that play. It's him. □

Now on SI.com
For a gallery of rare Vince Lombardi photos, go to SI.com/photo

Who's Hot Who's Not

TROYS
Troys are on fire: Rockies SS Troy Tulowitzki's RBI capped an epic nine-run comeback against the Braves; Columbus, Ga., pitcher Troy Gilliland tossed a five-hit shutout in the LLWS quarters; and Troy Polamalu, back from an injury-plagued '09, just had his Paris-like locks insured for $1 million.



TROJANS
Troy burns, indeed. The Football Writers Association of America took back the national title trophy it awarded USC in 2004; Matt Leinart *(left)* was benched by Arizona; Denver's LenDale White will serve a four-game suspension; and new AD Pat Haden opined that Reggie Bush ought to return his '05 Heisman.

EARLY GOLF RISER
Hyped at age 12, derided as a teen, Michelle Wie *(right)* at 20 has the gritty game to match her sweet swing. Wie's wire-to-wire win at the Canadian Open included an ace—her eighth, but "the first time I actually had seen it go in in a tournament. . . . It was surreal."



EARLY GOLF WAKE-UP CALL
Jim. Jim. HEY, FURYK! With $10 million on the line in the FedEx Cup playoffs, shouldn't you have a functioning alarm clock? Furyk overslept and missed his 7:30 a.m. tee time for the pro-am at the Barclay's, resulting in a DQ. "I've got no one to blame but myself," he said.

SAM THE RAM
Yeah, it's only the preseason. Still you had to notice rookie St. Louis QB Sam Bradford's 15-for-22, 189-yard, two-TD evening in Foxborough last Thursday. "He was putting the ball on the money," Rams RB Steven Jackson said of the No. 1 overall pick *(right)*.



SAM: SCRAM?
Sammy Sosa is miffed that the Cubs are letting rookie Tyler Colvin wear the 21 jersey in which Sammy slammed 545 homers. "[That number] should be untouchable," he told *Chicago Magazine*. Maybe, Sammy, you shouldn't have left that final '04 game so early?

JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES (LEINART); DARREN CARROLL/GETTY IMAGES (WIE); DAMIAN STROHMEYER (BRADFORD)

Mann Down

An ex–LPGA star's antimosque rant has divided the golf community

Last week Carol Mann, an LPGA star in the '60s and '70s and winner of 38 tournaments worldwide, let loose a rant on her Facebook page, criticizing the proposed construction of an Islamic cultural center near where the World Trade Center towers were located before the 9/11 attacks. "It's too much of a flagrant demonstration of our own 'tolerance' out of control," Mann wrote. "The United States is a Christian country, founded on Christian principles and with an expectation of Christian behavior. Let the Muslims erect their worship centers in other countries that are not Christian. Go away—soon!" (By week's end Mann, who couldn't be reached for comment, was allowing only her Facebook friends to see her postings.)



SPEAKING FREELY For her views, Mann will not suffer any repercussions from the Hall.

Mann, who lives in The Woodlands, the massive Houston golf development, has been a prominent supporter of women's golf for decades and, at times, an outspoken one. In 2008 Mann reportedly supported a plan by then LPGA commissioner Carolyn Bivens to require all LPGA players to know English. The idea died a quick and painful death.

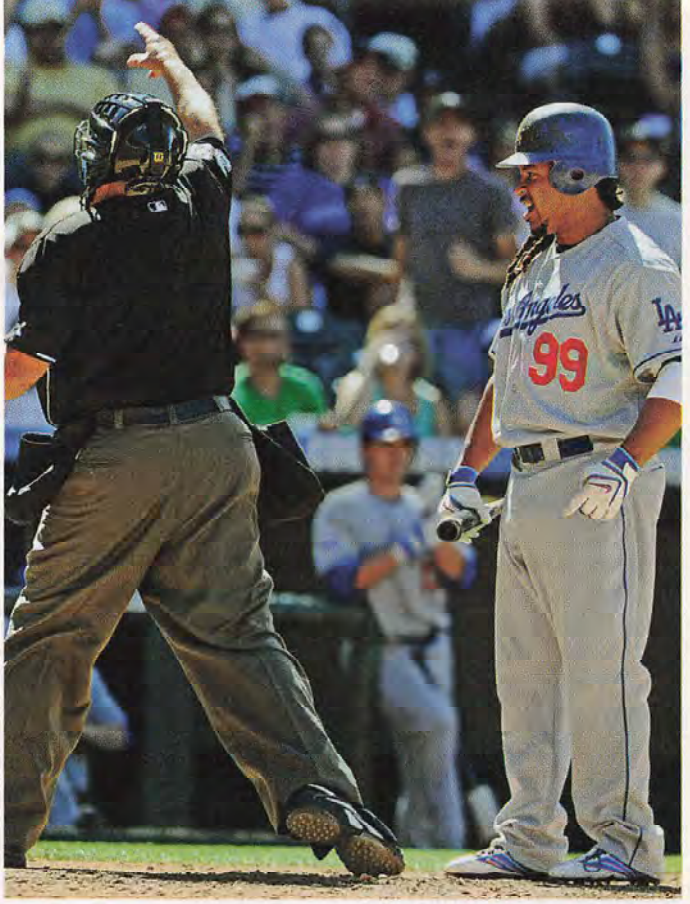
The World Golf Hall of Fame has three "ambassadors": Gary Player, Ben Crenshaw . . . and Mann. When casual golfers chatted last week—in person, on websites, on Twitter—there was a deep divide over Mann's comments. Many were offended by her words, yet others supported her view. Some were just left scratching their heads. Her gig is not likely in jeopardy. The World Golf Hall of Fame's chief operating officer, Jack Peter, said last week, "It's Carol's personal website, so we're not going to comment."

At the same time, professional golf has never looked more worldly. On the LPGA and PGA tours this year, winning golfers have come from the United States, England, Germany, Northern Ireland, Korea and Japan. Oh, and India, with its 150 million Muslims.

—Michael Bamberger

SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

A Kentucky State Fair blue ribbon for home brewing was awarded to the maker of a bitter beer called Blackmail Ale, which features a picture on its label of Karen Sypher, the woman convicted of extorting Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino.



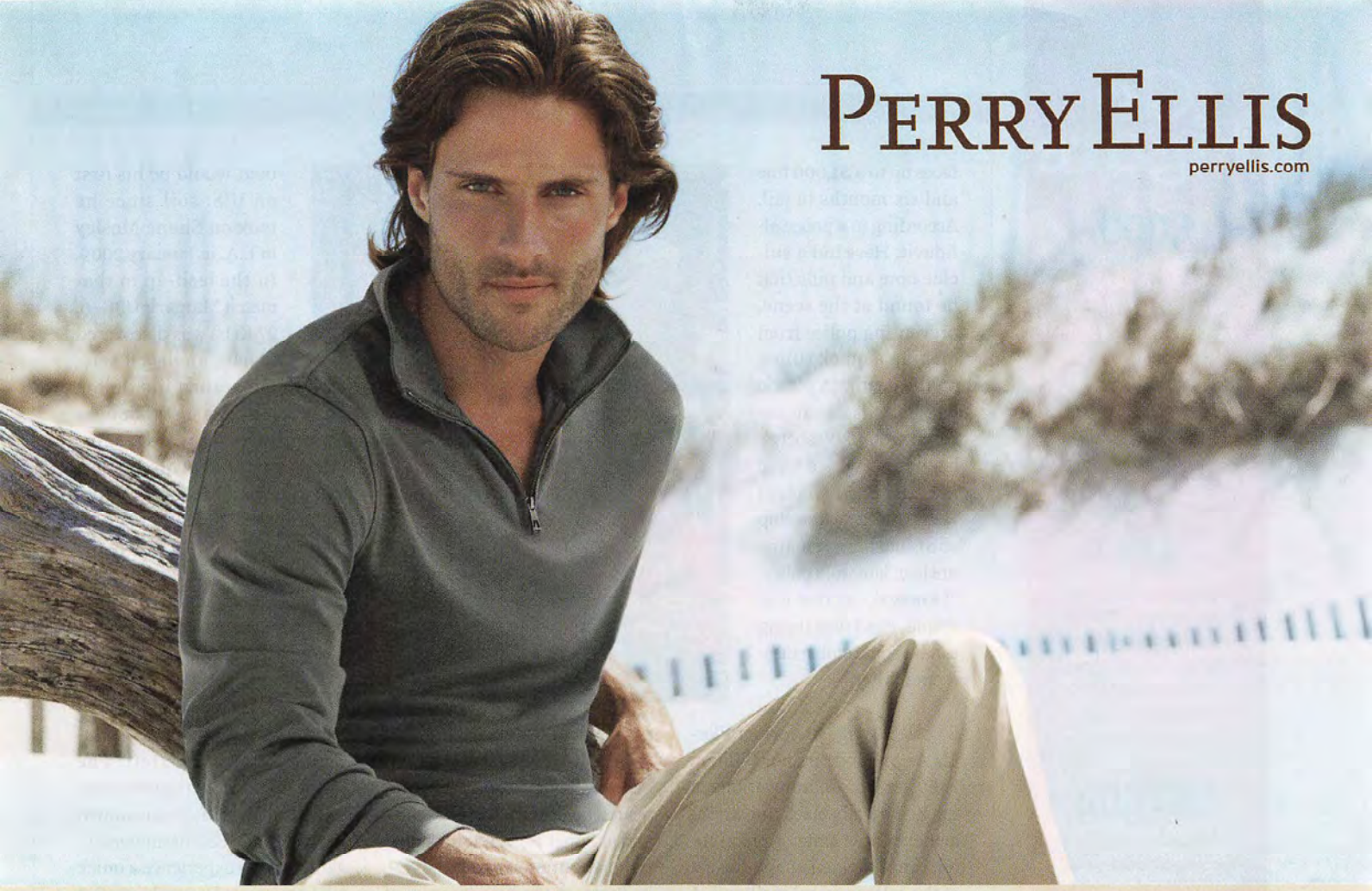
MATT MCCLAIN/AP (RAMIREZ); BEN VAN HOOK (MANN)

For the Record

Claimed Off of waivers by the White Sox, for whom he'll likely be a designated hitter, Dodgers leftfielder Manny Ramirez. The 38-year-old, 12-time All-Star came to L.A. from Boston (where he won two World Series, including, in '04, Series MVP accolades) in '08 and caught on quickly, batting .396 with 17 homers in his first 53 games. L.A. rewarded him with a two-year, $45 million contract, but the relationship soured after Ramirez failed a drug test in '09 (he was suspended for 50 games) and frequented the disabled list in '10. To Chicago, which sat 4½ games behind Minnesota in the AL Central through Sunday, Ramirez brings a .311 average and his tempestuous nature: He was tossed from his last game with L.A. on Sunday *(above)* after disputing a strike call on the first pitch he faced.

Tightened By NBC this season on its telecasts of Notre Dame home football games, commercial breaks. Hoping not to unduly restrain the hurry-up, often no-huddle offense being installed by first-year Fighting Irish coach Brian Kelly, the network (which has aired Notre Dame games since 1991) agreed to employ five breaks per quarter, all shorter than the four slotted in previous seasons. "We've talked to NBC about the way we like to play the game," Kelly said on Aug. 24. "I'm very confident that we are going to be able to do the things that we want to do in terms of pushing the tempo without having to go to a commercial break."

Ruled By a Nevada coroner, that the May 9 death of 25-year-old LPGA golfer Erica Blasberg was a suicide (attributable to asphyxia and a lethal cocktail of pills) that had been covered up by one of the golfer's friends. On Aug. 24 Henderson police arrested 43-year-old physician Thomas Hess, who made the 911 call reporting Blasberg's death, and charged him with misdemeanor obstruction of justice. Hess was released on bail and



PERRY ELLIS AND MACY'S INVITE YOU TO MEET YOUR

HOMETOWN HEROES

SHOP THE LATEST LOOKS FROM OUR FALL COLLECTION AND MEET YOUR HOMETOWN HERO. PLUS RECEIVE A COMPLIMENTARY FOOTBALL* FOR HIM TO AUTOGRAPH** WITH A PURCHASE OF $50 OR MORE OF PERRY ELLIS MERCHANDISE. THE FIRST 50 CUSTOMERS WILL ALSO RECEIVE A PERRY ELLIS GIFT BAG.



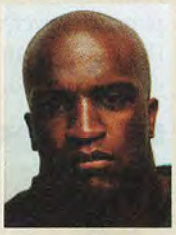
LESEAN MCCOY
PHILADELPHIA RUNNING BACK
SATURDAY, 10/02 - 4:30 PM
MACY'S ROOSEVELT MALL
2399 COTTMAN AVE.
PHILADELPHIA, PA



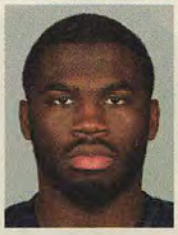
VERNON DAVIS
SAN FRANCISCO TIGHT END
THURSDAY, 10/07 - 6:30 PM
MACY'S VALLEY FAIR
2801 STEVENS CREEK BLVD.
SANTA CLARA, CA



STEVE SMITH
NEW YORK WIDE RECEIVER
THURSDAY, 10/14 - 6:00 PM
MACY'S GARDEN STATE PLAZA
500 GARDEN STATE PLAZA
PARAMUS, NJ



DAVID HARRIS
NEW YORK LINEBACKER
THURSDAY, 11/04 - 6:30 PM
MACY'S ROOSEVELT FIELD
630 OLD COUNTRY ROAD
GARDEN CITY, NY



EARL BENNETT
CHICAGO WIDE RECEIVER
FRIDAY, 11/05 - 6:00 PM
MACY'S OLD ORCHARD
1 OLD ORCHARD SHOPPING CENTER
SKOKIE, IL

EVENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE OR CANCELLATION. *OFFER AND ITEMS AVAILABLE WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. **ONLY ITEMS SUPPLIED BY PERRY ELLIS WILL BE SIGNED. SORRY, NO OTHER MEMORABILIA OR PERSONAL ITEMS WILL BE SIGNED. LIMIT ONE SIGNED ITEM PER PURCHASE. DUE TO THE USUAL LARGE TURNOUT FOR CELEBRITY PERSONAL APPEARANCES, PERRY ELLIS CANNOT GUARANTEE THAT ALL INDIVIDUALS WILL BE ABLE TO OBTAIN AN AUTOGRAPH DURING THE SCHEDULED APPEARANCE. NO POSED PHOTOGRAPHS WILL BE PERMITTED. ALL PURCHASES NON-REFUNDABLE AND AVAILABLE ONLY FOR MERCHANDISE EXCHANGE.

macy's

Go Figure

1,000
Career strikeouts reached by 24-year-old Mariners righty Felix Hernandez in an Aug. 25 win over the Red Sox. Only three pitchers have whiffed 1,000 by an earlier age: Bob Feller (22), Bert Blyleven (23) and Dwight Gooden (23).

2%
Decrease from 2009 in the average value of an NFL franchise, according to *Forbes*, marking the first drop since the magazine began keeping track in 1998.

$50,000
Las Vegas tab, including $35,000 at a bar, run up last week by Central Florida guards Jeffrey and Marcus Jordan, sons of Hall of Famer Michael Jordan, according to a post (later removed) on 19-year-old Marcus's Twitter feed.

$60 million
Cost to taxpayers of an 18,000-seat football complex approved last week for Allen (Texas) High, the 2008 5A state champion. The facility will be ready for the 2012 season.

9
First basemen used by the Angels since starter Kendry Morales broke his left leg during a home plate celebration on May 29.

1:41.01
Time in which Kenya's David Rudisha ran the 800 meters on Sunday, the second time he broke the world record in seven days.

faces up to a $1,000 fine and six months in jail. According to a police affidavit, Hess hid a suicide note and pills that he found at the scene, preventing police from making a quick ruling on the death. (A plastic bag had also been secured around Blasberg's head, and police were investigating foul play.) Hess, whose relationship with Blasberg remains unclear, later told police, "I know doing that was stupid, but I was trying to save some embarrassment for her."



Died At age 91, former Florida A&M band director William P. Foster, whose innovations at the historically black university, achieved in a time of racial intolerance, helped shape the art of the college marching band. A clarinet player with degrees in music from Kansas and Wayne State and a doctorate from Columbia, Foster arrived in Tallahassee in 1946 when the A&M program had 16 members. He renamed his unit the Marching 100 *(above)* in hopes that his charges would someday reach that number and, defying the style of the time, incorporated the sounds of black pop music—jazz, rock and R&B, often sampling whatever was popular on the radio—into his creatively choreographed, high-stepping routines. The Marching 100 (whose ranks eventually numbered as many as 400) later appeared on televised award shows and at Super Bowls, at presidential inaugurations and, in 1989, in Paris, at the bicentennial of the French Revolution. "Energy," Foster *(inset, above)* said, in summing up his style before retiring in '98. "Lots of energy. . . . Dazzle them with it."

Licensed To box in Texas after being denied the same request in California, former welterweight champion Antonio Margarito, opening the door for a Nov. 13 fight for a vacant junior middleweight belt with current welterweight champ Manny Pacquiao (51-3-2, 38 KOs). For Margarito, the bout would be his first on U.S. soil since he took on Shane Mosley in L.A. in January 2009. In the lead-up to that match Margarito (38–6, 27 KOs) was discovered to have an illegal plasterlike substance inside his hand wraps. He lost that fight on a ninth-round KO, after which his California license was revoked. State regulators later brushed off Margarito's excuse that he was ignorant of the inserts and denied him a new license, leading to the change of venue, which was approved last week without a hearing.

Signed With the United Football League's Omaha Nighthawks, Maurice Clarett. The former Ohio State running back scored the winning touchdown in the 2002 BCS championship game only to experience a quick fall from grace: He was banned at OSU for accepting improper gifts, sued the NFL over his draft eligibility and later spent 3½ years in prison on charges of robbery and concealing a weapon. Last week an Ohio judge granted permission for the back to leave the state, allowing him 30 days to try out for the Nighthawks. Before Clarett signed a one-year deal on Monday, UFL commissioner Michael Huyghue urged Omaha to invest fully into the former Buckeye. "Just throwing him to the wolves," said Huyghue, "I wouldn't be interested in that."



THEY SAID IT

Bud Selig
MLB commissioner and former Brewers owner on the unveiling of a statue in his likeness outside Milwaukee's Miller Park last week:

"The guy didn't have much to work with, considering I've never been confused with Clark Gable."

MARK COWAN/ICON SMI (A&M); NEIL LEIFER (FOSTER); SELZNICK/MGM/PHOTOFEST (GABLE); THEO WARGO/GETTY IMAGES (SELIG)

FIRST IS BEST.

FIRST IS WHY WE COMPETE.

FIRST STREAMS THE ACTION LIVE SO YOU DON'T MISS A FIRST.

FIRST IS ALL ABOUT TEAM, SHARING INTERNET WITH UP TO EIGHT WI-FI ENABLED DEVICES.

FIRST IS 4G, BUT PLAYS NICE WITH 3G AS WELL.

FIRST ISN'T LATER, IT'S NOW.

WHAT WILL YOU DO FIRST WITH EVO, THE FIRST 4G PHONE?

Sprint
The Now Network™



htc EVO™ 4G

sprint.com/firsts
1-800-SPRINT-1 (1-800-777-4681)

HTC EVO™ 4G: First 4G phone in the U.S. While supplies last. May require up to a $36 activation fee/line, credit approval and deposit. Up to a $200 early termination fee/line applies. Taxes and service charges excluded. Phone requires a two-year Agreement and activation on a select service plan with Premium Data add-on. Optional $29.99/month Sprint mobile hotspot add-on required to access Wi-Fi on device. This phone allows photo and video playback on an HD-capable auxiliary device, but it does not provide HD playback directly on the phone. Accessory cable is available separately. **Other Terms:** No discounts apply to add-ons $29.99 or below. Coverage is not available everywhere. The Nationwide Sprint Network reaches over 275 million people. Sprint 4G Network reaches over 45 markets and counting, on select devices. Sprint 3G Network reaches over 262 million people. See sprint.com/4G for details. Not all services are available on 4G, and coverage may default to 3G/separate network where 4G is unavailable. Offers not available in all markets/retail locations or for all phones/networks. Pricing, offer terms, fees and features may vary for existing customers not eligible for upgrade. Other restrictions apply. See store or sprint.com for details. ©2010 Sprint. Sprint and the logo are trademarks of Sprint. The HTC logo and HTC EVO are trademarks of HTC Corporation. Other marks are the property of their respective owners.

BEST BUY · RadioShack. · FOCUS on driving

A Mere Speed Bump

Book it: Stephen Strasburg will be back and firing full force

You expected all the flags in the nation's capital to be lowered to half-mast given how hard the city—and the entire baseball map, really—took last week's announcement that Nationals pitching phenom Stephen Strasburg will undergo Tommy John surgery, and possibly miss the entire 2011 season, after tearing the ulnar collateral ligament in his right elbow. But Strasburg's injury shouldn't be mistaken for a national tragedy; it's just a delay in his arrival as the best pitcher in baseball.

Tommy John surgery, once the three most dreaded words a pitcher could hear, has become almost a sure thing. (Roughly 90% of hurlers who've undergone the procedure have come back at or close to their preinjury level.) Thus, odds are overwhelming that Strasburg, who struck out 92 of the 274 hitters he faced in the majors, will return in 2012 as the pitcher he was in '10. One in nine pitchers on active big league rosters today has undergone the procedure, including 10 of the 33 at this year's All-Star Game. On the same day that Strasburg faced reporters in Washington, 24-year-old Cardinals lefthander Jamie Garcia—an NL rookie of the year front-runner who had Tommy John surgery following the '08 season and sat out '09—shut out the Nationals over 5⅓ innings and lowered his season ERA to 2.33.



TOMMY GUNS
Strasburg (center) has medical mound models in Garcia (left) and Johnson.

Depending on the speed of Strasburg's rehab, the Nationals will have the option of sitting him out for the 2011 season (and the four off-season months) or roll him out as early as next September for a limited number of low-pressure starts. (Josh Johnson, the Marlins' 26-year-old ace and a top four NL Cy Young candidate, had Tommy John surgery in August '07 and was back on the mound within 12 months, throwing harder than he was before the procedure.) Whatever they choose, the Nationals must decide whether Strasburg's delivery needs to be overhauled. The righthander throws with what scouts call an inverted W motion, in which the elbows rise above the shoulders, culminating in a whiplike action producing violent stress.

It will be a long year for Nats fans, but when he returns, Strasburg will be 23, his prospects undimmed. —*Albert Chen*

The Pop Culture Grid

Athletes in the mix	If my team were on *Hard Knocks*....	My advice to Tiger	*The Big C* is....	The Premier League is....	Eat, Pray, Love. And then?
JIMMY CONRAD K.C. Wizards D	You'd see my Justin Bieber shrine	Take a break; get some rest	Cancer. Ladies call me Big C, too	One of the best leagues	Sleep
KATIE DOUGLAS Fever G	We'd be the No. 1 show on TV	Eat, pray, love!	Tamika Catchings	Football, also known as soccer	Can I say make love?
CHRISTINA KIM LPGA	Everything would have to be on mute	Don't swing so fast	Christina; Everyone knows I'm not a size 2	Proper "football" in England	Do it all over again
DANIEL BARD Red Sox P	I don't think I'd want that	Keep your head down	Charlotte, N.C.—my hometown	The American League	Pitch



Inside the Grid

The proposition that men are from Mars, women are from Venus was borne out by our Gridsters' *Eat Pray Love* responses. "The emphasis is on *love*," declared Kim. Maybe a sequel to the current hit flick could have **Julia Roberts** follow Bard's advice and learn how to throw a screwball?

RUSSELL: J. ANSFORD/ICON SMI (GARCIA); JOHN BIEVER (STRASBURG); TOM DIPACE; JOHNSON); FRANCOIS DUHAMEL/© COLUMBIA PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION (ROBERTS); GREG NELSON (BARD); ROBERT BECK/SMI; RICK SCUTERI/REUTERS (DOUGLAS); ANDY MEAD/YCJ/ICON SMI (CONRAD); GUS RUELAS/AP (BIEBER); WALT DISNEY PHOTO/FEST (S. LEEPY)

"OLDEST FAMILY-OWNED GENERAL STORE IN THE U.S."

(EVERYTHING FROM 99 CENT TIES TO VOODOO POTIONS)
A. SCHWAB DRY GOODS, BEALE STREET, MEMPHIS, TN





SOME SECRETS ARE WORTH SHARING.

SMOOTH BOURBON. PRICED RIGHT.
SPREAD THE WORD.

EVANWILLIAMS.COM

Think Wisely.
Drink Wisely.®

Evan Williams Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey. Distilled in Kentucky. Bottled by Old Evan Williams Distillery, Bardstown, KY. 40004. 43% Alc./Vol. ©2010

Good coaches win on Saturday.

And Sunday.

And Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Liberty Mutual
COACH OF THE YEAR

Recognizing college football coaches who win both on and off the field.

Vote for your favorite, starting September 14th.

COACHOFTHEYEAR.COM/SI

Faces in the Crowd

Edited by ELIZABETH McGARR



Eddie Swanson

NASHVILLE > Powerlifting

Swanson, a 50-year-old personal trainer, set a national power curl record (160 pounds) in the 198-pound, 50-to-59-year-old division at the World Natural Powerlifting Federation Nationals. He qualified for the world tournament of champions in November. Last February, Swanson was outstanding lifter at the Tennessee championships.



Jane Croson

LAKEWOOD, CALIF. > Volleyball

Jane, a senior at Los Alamitos High, partnered with Summer Ross to defeat a Russian team (21–10, 18–21, 15–7) in the final of the U-19 beach world championships in Porto, Portugal, and become the first U.S. pair to win the title. Three weeks earlier, as a junior national team member, Jane was MVP of the NORCECA junior continental championship.

HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO FACE

Cassy Isagawa

POWERED BY MAXPREPS.com

WAILUKU, HAWAII > Golf

Cassy, a senior at Baldwin High, won the Junior PGA Championship over Florida's Ginger Howard in a three-hole playoff after the two finished tied through 54 holes. The victory earned Cassy, the 2010 Hawaii high school champion, a spot on the U.S. Junior Ryder Cup team. In July she won a second Hawaii junior title.

To see Cassy's video, go to **MaxPreps.com/videofaces**





Jerad Curry

POWERED BY MAXPREPS.com

BUFORD, GA. > Baseball

Jerad, a senior catcher at Mill Creek High, was named MVP of the Junior Sunbelt Classic tournament after leading Team Georgia to a 5–4 win over Tennessee in the final. In 10 games he batted .483, with 13 RBIs and five home runs, including one in the title game. As a junior at Mill Creek, Jerad tied for the team lead with 11 homers and 11 doubles.



Tanelle Berard

CLIVE, IOWA > Triathlon

Tanelle, a senior at Dowling Catholic High, won the junior elite title at USA Triathlon's Junior Triathlon Festival for the second straight year. She finished the 750-meter swim, 20K bike ride and 5K run in 1:03:25, 44 seconds ahead of the next competitor. Tanelle was chosen to represent the U.S. at the junior world championships in Budapest on Sept. 12.





Evan Elig and Andrew Chun

LA JOLLA, CALIF. > Water Polo

Evan and Andrew, seventh-graders at The Bishop's School, were co-MVPs of the U-12 division at the Junior Olympics for the champion San Diego Shores A squad, which went 7–0. Evan led the team with 15 goals; in the final Andrew, a goalie, had 15 saves and allowed one goal.

MAXPREPS.com

Nominate Now on SI.com

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd or to submit a high school Face to maxpreps.com, go to **SI.com/faces**

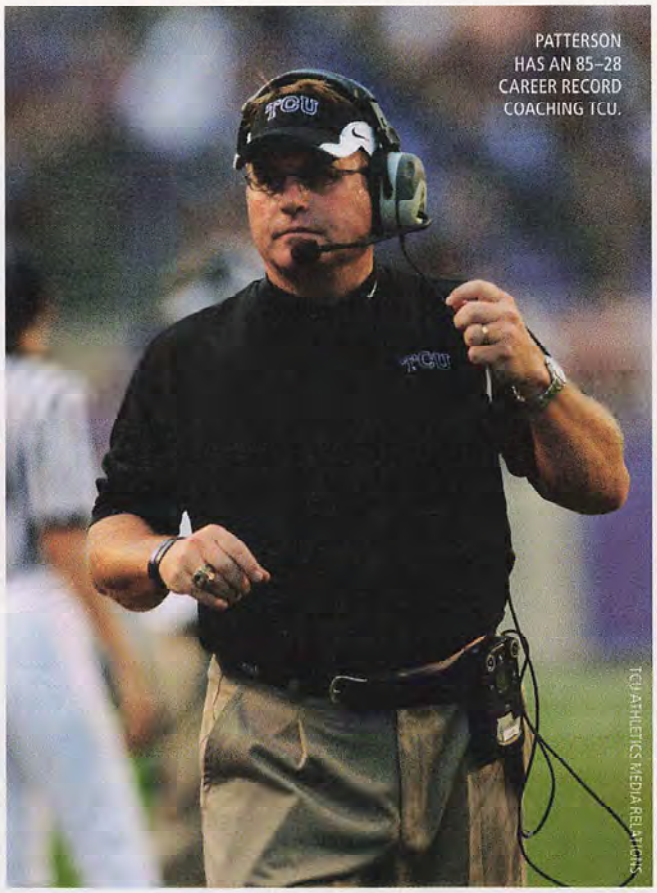
TONY WEAR (SWANSON); USA VOLLEYBALL (CROSON); COURTESY OF THE ISAGAWA FAMILY (ISAGAWA); MAGIC MOMENT PHOTOGRAPHY, GRAYSON, GA (CURRY); STEVE FRY (BERARD); JULIE ELIG (ELIG); JEAN CHUN (CHUN)

Liberty Mutual
COACH OF THE YEAR

Liberty Mutual Insurance Presents
True Leaders: Conversations with Archie Manning

GAME CHANGER

Texas Christian coach Gary Patterson speaks with Archie Manning about teaching his players maturity and accountability


PATTERSON HAS AN 85–28 CAREER RECORD COACHING TCU.

TCU ATHLETICS MEDIA RELATIONS

TCU coach Gary Patterson led the Horned Frogs to a 12–1 record in 2009, his ninth season at the program's helm. The team finished the season ranked sixth in the country, and Patterson, 50, was named the 2009 Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year in Division I for his work on and off the football field. In this conversation with football legend Archie Manning, Patterson stresses that his goal is always to help his players grow as young men.

MANNING: I know from my experience as a college player that the coach often takes on the role of a father to the young men on the team. Do you feel that way?
PATTERSON: I'm a lot better at it than I was 10 years ago. I've grown into knowing what it's like to walk in their shoes. Coaches have a responsibility for what kind of men our players become. I'm tough on them in practice, but I'd rather embarrass them in front of the trees on Wednesday than in front of 50,000 fans and a national TV audience on Saturday.

AM: That goes well with one of your favorite sayings regarding your players: "We gotta grow 'em up."
GP: It's just like being a parent. You don't always tell them what they want to hear. When you see a kid who never thought he'd get a degree actually get one, that's satisfying. We tell our players that when you come here, you turn a fresh page in life. You're looking at an unwritten paragraph. I ask them, "When you leave TCU, what's that paragraph going to say?" It's not what I think about you—it's what *you do*.

AM: Your team has been honored for its graduation rate, and many TCU players earn a degree in four years. How do you do it?
GP: We help them set up an academic plan and hold them accountable; we find out what their deficiencies are and make them better. We say, "If you miss class, your teacher thinks the same thing your boss will think if you're missing work." It goes back to your reputation. Our job is to push that envelope and give them guidelines to live up to. Last year we had 13 seniors, and all of them graduated.

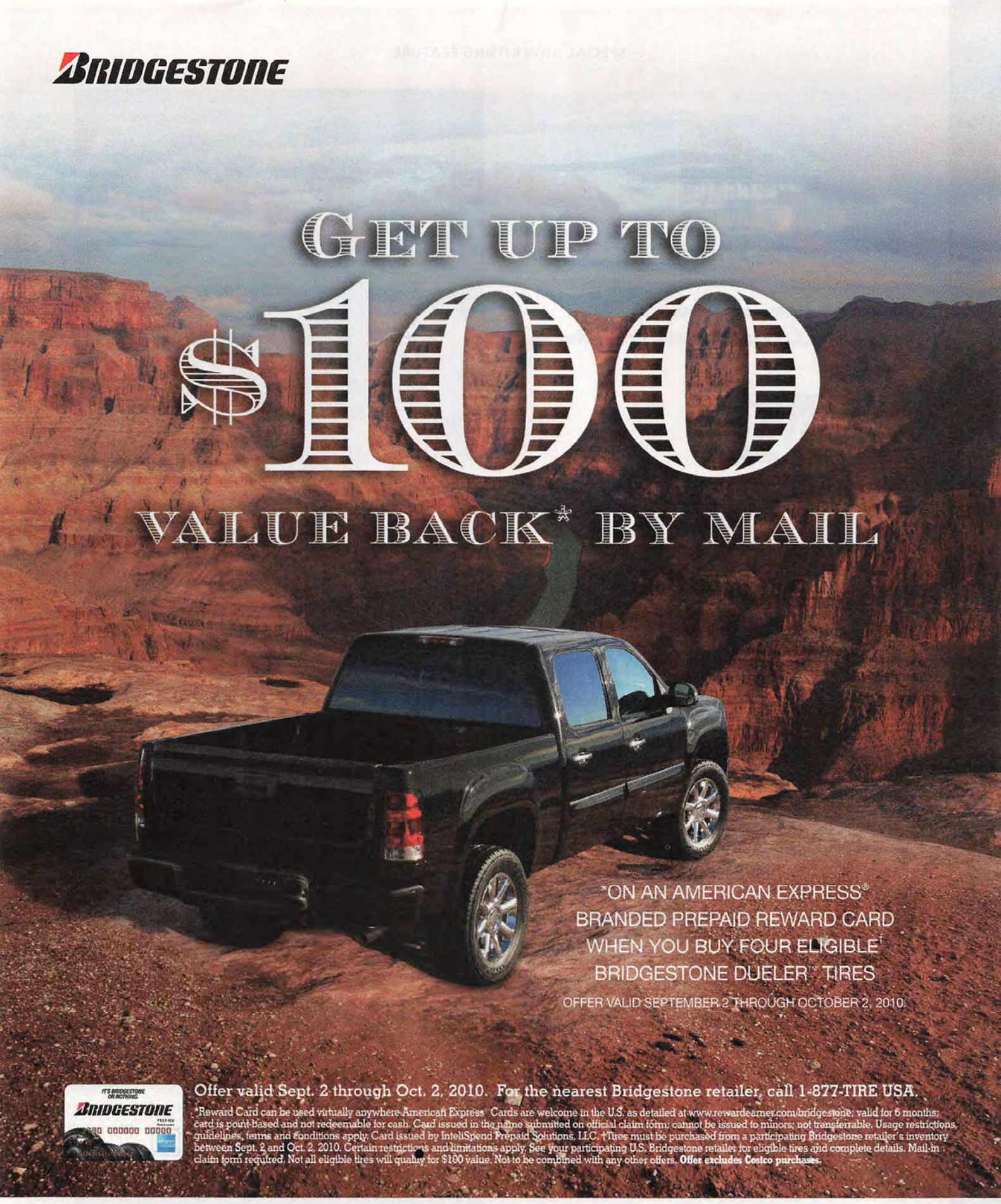
AM: You established the Gary Patterson Foundation to give back to the Fort Worth community. How does that rub off on your players?
GP: We started the foundation [pattersonfoundation.org] so we could give back to the community. Our players make visits to a homeless shelter, and that's just one example of their commitment. We want to help people get back on their feet and offer opportunities to kids who have an economic disadvantage in life.

AM: You've been very loyal to TCU. Are you ever tempted by new opportunities?
GP: People move for the wrong reasons, for ego. If something is the right fit for you, you have a chance to be successful. I tell our players that all the time about their lives beyond football.

HAVE A QUESTION FOR ARCHIE?
Ask him about anything from football to family at
COACHOFTHEYEAR.COM/ARCHIE

BRIDGESTONE

GET UP TO $100 VALUE BACK* BY MAIL



*ON AN AMERICAN EXPRESS® BRANDED PREPAID REWARD CARD WHEN YOU BUY FOUR ELIGIBLE† BRIDGESTONE DUELER™ TIRES

OFFER VALID SEPTEMBER 2 THROUGH OCTOBER 2, 2010.

Offer valid Sept. 2 through Oct. 2, 2010. For the nearest Bridgestone retailer, call 1-877-TIRE USA.

*Reward Card can be used virtually anywhere American Express® Cards are welcome in the U.S. as detailed at www.rewardsamex.com/bridgestone; valid for 6 months; card is point-based and not redeemable for cash. Card issued in the name submitted on official claim form; cannot be issued to minors; not transferrable. Usage restrictions, guidelines, terms and conditions apply. Card issued by InteliSpend Prepaid Solutions, LLC. †Tires must be purchased from a participating Bridgestone retailer's inventory between Sept. 2 and Oct. 2, 2010. Certain restrictions and limitations apply. See your participating U.S. Bridgestone retailer for eligible tires and complete details. Mail-in claim form required. Not all eligible tires will qualify for $100 value. Not to be combined with any other offers. **Offer excludes Costco purchases.**



DUELER™

bridgestonetire.com tiresafety.com

PASSION for EXCELLENCE



Just My Type

By Dan Patrick

The Interview

Peyton Manning COLTS QUARTERBACK

The four-time MVP and spokesman extraordinaire (including for DirecTV's NFL Sunday Ticket) is entering his 13th season in the NFL

Dan Patrick: *Where can you go and not get recognized?*

Peyton Manning: It just depends on who's there. Certainly in Indiana, Tennessee, Louisiana, I probably get a little more recognized. It's NFL Sunday Ticket's fault more than anything—now everywhere you go, you've got NFL football fans who are keeping up with it and know what you look like. That's part of the deal, but it's not a problem.

DP: *When you throw an interception, are you instructed to stay as far away as possible from the person who picked you off?*

PM: No. You're supposed to cover. You try to work the sidelines and force the cutback. We used to do a tackling drill in college, but I always thought it was bad karma, kind of a bad [thing] to practice.

DP: *Have you avoided more sacks because of your arm or because of your legs?*

PM: I'd say a combination, but probably not legs as much as feet. A slide here or there, or a step-up here or there when a defensive end is coming around the end hard, reaching for you. The off-season work has as much to do with [avoiding sacks] as anything because the receivers are so tuned in to getting open on time. I know when they're coming out of their breaks. It's not a test back there of how long you can hold the ball or how long your right or left tackle can hold up [a pass rusher]. The idea is to get the ball out of my hands and into the playmakers' hands.

DP: *Eli got stitches recently. What's the most number of stitches you inflicted upon him as a kid?*

PM: I never inflicted any upon Eli. Cooper, being two years older, inflicted a few upon me wrestling on my parents' bed or playing football in the neighbors' yard. I was kind of a stitch-kid growing up. But I can't remember ever having 12 across the forehead like Eli got.

DP: *At what point in your career would you not be insulted if the Colts spent a high draft pick on a quarterback?*

PM: I've never had feelings toward that one way or the other. If that's what the Colts felt they needed to do to improve our team, then I guess there would be a reason for it. Bill Polian is a guy you can't second-guess when it comes to the draft. Right now it'd be somewhat disappointing because you'd like to be able to get another player who could help us at another position. But you've got to have thick skin in this business, and I'm no different.

DP: *What would you say to Lane Kiffin if you ran into him?*

PM: It'd probably be a short conversation. I think the one thing where Tennessee was kind of hurt—our pride was hurt. We didn't think that Tennessee is a transition job. I've always thought, and the Big Orange Nation has always thought, that it is a destination job.

DP: *Fifteen years from now, would you consider coaching your alma mater?*

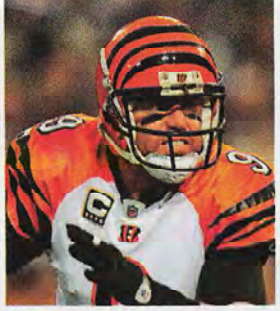
PM: I doubt it. I enjoy coaching young kids. We have a football camp in Louisiana where we get to coach eighth-graders through seniors on playing quarterback. I enjoy teaching them. It'd be hard to go onto the recruiting trail. In the NFL people say, 'You're a good play-caller—you'd be a good coach.' I'm only good at calling plays when I'm playing quarterback. I stink at it when I get on the sidelines. □



Now Hear This

Listen to the podcasts at **danpatrick.com/interviews**

1. Hall of Famer **John Elway** on Tim Tebow's mechanics.
2. **Bobby Bowden** discusses leaving Florida State.



Futures Bet

I asked Cincinnati quarterback Carson Palmer which team would have more wins if it played the same number of games: the Bengals or his alma mater, USC. Palmer conceded probably USC, because they "have three or four cupcakes" on their schedule. Palmer likes Cincinnati's chances this year, but he wouldn't go so far as to say it should be my Super Bowl pick—yet. He was, however, more confident about the prospect of lifting the Lombardi Trophy in a different role in the future—as a general manager. "I think I could win a Super Bowl," Palmer said. "I have a good eye for talent at a number of positions."

Orange Crush

Texas coach Mack Brown told me that if Reggie Bush is stripped of the Heisman Trophy he won in 2005, it should be given to former Longhorns quarterback Vince Young, who finished second that year. That's not surprising, given Brown's loyalty to UT. Brown told me that he tries to wear an orange shirt every day of the year. "I don't even have [anything] green or red for Christmas," he said.

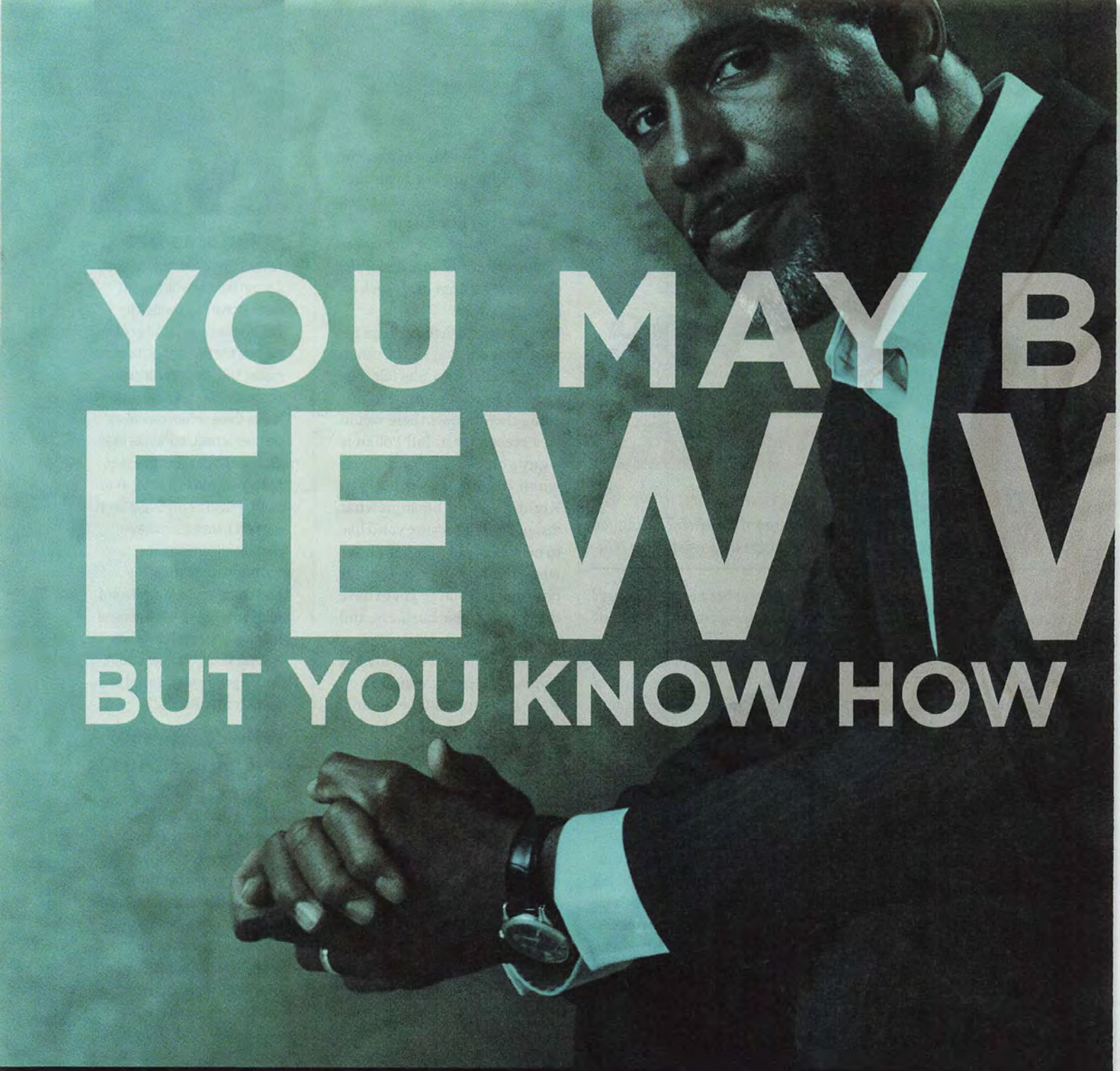
Line of the week



Fox Sports' Michael Strahan isn't a big fan of predicting what will happen in five months: **"I don't have any Super Bowl picks. If anybody does, they're insane."**

MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/DEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY (PATRICK); JOHN BIEVER (PALMER); DAVID BERGMAN (STRAHAN); BRIAN SPURLOCK/USPRESSWIRE (MANNING)

THE FINE PRINT: More confidential MLB financial data leaked: Turns out the Phillies spent $100,000 a year on Adderall for the Phanatic.



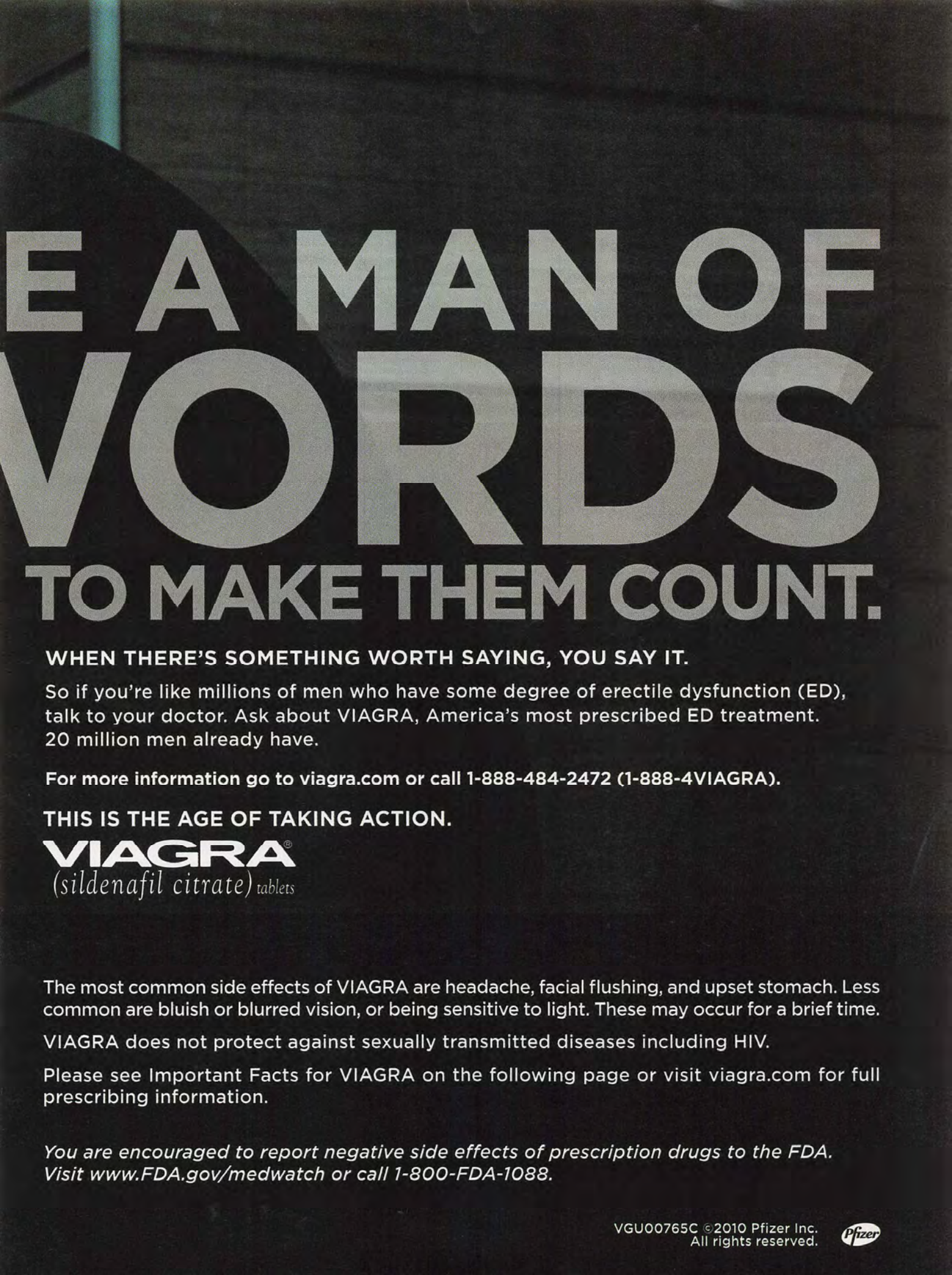
WITH EVERY AGE COMES RESPONSIBILITY. IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION BELOW.

We know that no medicine is for everyone. Don't take VIAGRA if you take nitrates, often prescribed for chest pain, as this may cause a sudden unsafe drop in blood pressure.

Talk with your doctor first. Make sure your heart is healthy enough to have sex. If you have chest pain, nausea, or other discomforts during sex, seek medical help right away.

In the rare event of an erection lasting more than four hours, seek immediate medical help to avoid long-term injury.

In rare instances, men who take PDE5 inhibitors (oral erectile dysfunction medicines, including VIAGRA) reported a sudden decrease or loss of vision, or sudden decrease or loss of hearing. It is not possible to determine whether these events are related directly to these medicines or to other factors. If you experience any of these symptoms, stop taking PDE5 inhibitors, including VIAGRA, and call a doctor right away.



WHEN THERE'S SOMETHING WORTH SAYING, YOU SAY IT.

So if you're like millions of men who have some degree of erectile dysfunction (ED), talk to your doctor. Ask about VIAGRA, America's most prescribed ED treatment. 20 million men already have.

For more information go to viagra.com or call 1-888-484-2472 (1-888-4VIAGRA).

THIS IS THE AGE OF TAKING ACTION.

VIAGRA®
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. Less common are bluish or blurred vision, or being sensitive to light. These may occur for a brief time.

VIAGRA does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV.

Please see Important Facts for VIAGRA on the following page or visit viagra.com for full prescribing information.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

VGU00765C ©2010 Pfizer Inc.
All rights reserved.

Pfizer

IMPORTANT FACTS

VIAGRA® (vi-AG-rah)
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION ABOUT VIAGRA

Never take VIAGRA if you take any medicines with nitrates. This includes nitroglycerin. Your blood pressure could drop quickly. It could fall to an unsafe or life-threatening level.

ABOUT ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)

Erectile dysfunction means a man cannot get or keep an erection. Health problems, injury, or side effects of drugs may cause ED. The cause may not be known.

ABOUT VIAGRA

VIAGRA is used to treat ED in men. When you want to have sex, VIAGRA can help you get and keep an erection when you are sexually excited. You cannot get an erection just by taking the pill. Only your doctor can prescribe VIAGRA.

VIAGRA does not cure ED.

VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) or HIV. You will need to use a condom.

VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

WHO IS VIAGRA FOR?

Who should take VIAGRA?

Men who have ED and whose heart is healthy enough for sex.

Who should NOT take VIAGRA?

- If you ever take medicines with nitrates:
  - Medicines that treat chest pain (angina), such as nitroglycerin or isosorbide mononitrate or dinitrate
- If you use some street drugs, such as "poppers" (amyl nitrate or nitrite)
- If you are allergic to anything in the VIAGRA tablet

BEFORE YOU START VIAGRA

Tell your doctor if you have or ever had:

- Heart attack, abnormal heartbeats, or stroke
- Heart problems, such as heart failure, chest pain, or aortic valve narrowing
- Low or high blood pressure
- Severe vision loss
- An eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa
- Kidney or liver problems
- Blood problems, such as sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- A deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- Stomach ulcers or any kind of bleeding problems

Tell your doctor about all your medicines. Include over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and herbal products. Tell your doctor if you take or use:

- Medicines called alpha-blockers to treat high blood pressure or prostate problems. Your blood pressure could suddenly get too low. You could get dizzy or faint. Your doctor may start you on a lower dose of VIAGRA.
- Medicines called protease inhibitors for HIV. Your doctor may prescribe a 25 mg dose. Your doctor may limit VIAGRA to 25 mg in a 48-hour period.
- Other methods to cause erections. These include pills, injections, implants, or pumps.
- A medicine called REVATIO. VIAGRA should not be used with REVATIO as REVATIO contains sildenafil, the same medicine found in VIAGRA.

POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF VIAGRA

Side effects are mostly mild to moderate. They usually go away after a few hours. Some of these are more likely to happen with higher doses.

The most common side effects are:

- Headache
- Feeling flushed
- Upset stomach

Less common side effects are:

- Trouble telling blue and green apart or seeing a blue tinge on things
- Eyes being more sensitive to light
- Blurred vision

Rarely, a small number of men taking VIAGRA have reported these serious events:

- Having an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If the erection is not treated right away, long-term loss of potency could occur.
- Sudden decrease or loss of sight in one or both eyes. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. They may be caused by conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes. If you have sudden vision changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Sudden decrease or loss of hearing. We do not know if these events are caused by VIAGRA and medicines like it or caused by other factors. If you have sudden hearing changes, stop using VIAGRA and all medicines like it. Call your doctor right away.
- Heart attack, stroke, irregular heartbeats, and death. We do not know whether these events are caused by VIAGRA or caused by other factors. Most of these happened in men who already had heart problems.

If you have any of these problems, stop VIAGRA. Call your doctor right away.

HOW TO TAKE VIAGRA

Do:

- Take VIAGRA only the way your doctor tells you. VIAGRA comes in 25 mg, 50 mg, and 100 mg tablets. Your doctor will tell you how much to take.
- If you are over 65 or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg).
- Take VIAGRA about 1 hour before you want to have sex. VIAGRA starts to work in about 30 minutes when you are sexually excited. VIAGRA lasts up to 4 hours.

Don't:

- Do not take VIAGRA more than once a day.
- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor tells you. If you think you need more VIAGRA, talk with your doctor.
- Do not start or stop any other medicines before checking with your doctor.

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

- This is only a summary of important information. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for complete product information OR
- Go to **www.viagra.com or call (888) 4-VIAGRA (484-2472).**

Uninsured? Need help paying for Pfizer medicine? Pfizer has programs that can help. Call **1-866-706-2400** or visit www.PfizerHelpfulAnswers.com.

helpful answers

Distributed by:
Pfizer Labs
Division of Pfizer Inc, NY, NY 10017

Rx Only ©2010 Pfizer Inc All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.
VGIF Rev 5 01/10
Registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

AVAILABLE NOW – SI.COM/iPAD



OFFICIAL LAUNCH SPONSORS OF THE SI APP: Sprint The Now Network · NISSAN · TOYOTA moving forward · at&t

iPad is a trademark of Apple Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. SI and Sports Illustrated are registered trademarks of Time Inc. ©2010 Time Inc.

THE WEEK IN SPORTS

Inside



Life After Tim

The Spurs prepare for the post–Tim Duncan era in familiar fashion: with an overlooked import, Tiago Splitter | BY CHRIS MANNIX

Quality centers are a rare breed. Even rarer is a quality center with a polished post game, a kamikaze approach to offensive rebounding and a professorial grasp of the pick-and-roll. So when one becomes available, a team might be willing to wait a year to get him. Or two. Or three. That's how long the Spurs have waited for Brazil's Tiago Splitter, their top pick in 2007, who signed a three-year, $11 million contract in July. It's a classic San Antonio move: Scoop up a skilled foreign player late in the draft (see Tony Parker, the 28th choice in 2001) and stash him overseas for a few years (Manu Ginóbili, whom the team selected 57th in 1999 and signed in 2002). "You could tell me that 29 teams think a guy is lousy," says an Eastern Conference scout, "but if the Spurs picked him, I'd put my money on that guy being good."

When Splitter entered the draft, concerns over his signability—he was under contract with the Spanish league's Tau Cerámica, which last year changed its name to Caja Laboral—caused him to slip to 28th. "We knew we were going to have to wait for him," says Spurs general manager R.C. Buford, "but we felt he was worth it."

The 6' 11", 235-pound Splitter has benefited from being the focus of Caja Laboral's post offense for the past two years. Last season he averaged 15.4 points on 59.5% shooting. His skills are now on display at the world championships in Turkey, where he averaged 14.0 points and 6.0 rebounds in Brazil's first three games—two comfortable wins and a 70–68 loss to the U.S. on Monday. At times Splitter was too much for the (albeit undersized) U.S. front line, showing a nifty array of post moves as he went 6 for 12 from the floor. He also grabbed 10 rebounds, including a game-high four on the offensive end. "He's a true low post five," says Tony Ronzone, USA Basketball's director of international player personnel. "A lot of European big men like to face up. He sits down on you, has no fear of contact and is a beast on the offensive glass."

In San Antonio, Splitter will be counted on to complement Tim Duncan ("We hope Tiago will allow us to be very judicious with Tim's minutes," says Buford) and help the Spurs transition from their longtime star. Duncan, 34, and Ginóbili, 33, are still the faces of the franchise, but San Antonio has a young core in Splitter, point guard George Hill (26th pick in 2008), power forward DeJuan Blair (37th pick in '09) and shooting guard James Anderson (20th pick in '10). "There's an impression that we are getting older," Buford says. "We're a lot younger than we were a few years ago, and our younger players have the ability to impact a game in a lot of different ways." □

TURKISH DELIGHT
Splitter (right) had 13 points and four boards in Brazil's 81–65 win over Iran in Istanbul.

Photograph by MARK J. TERRILL/AP

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

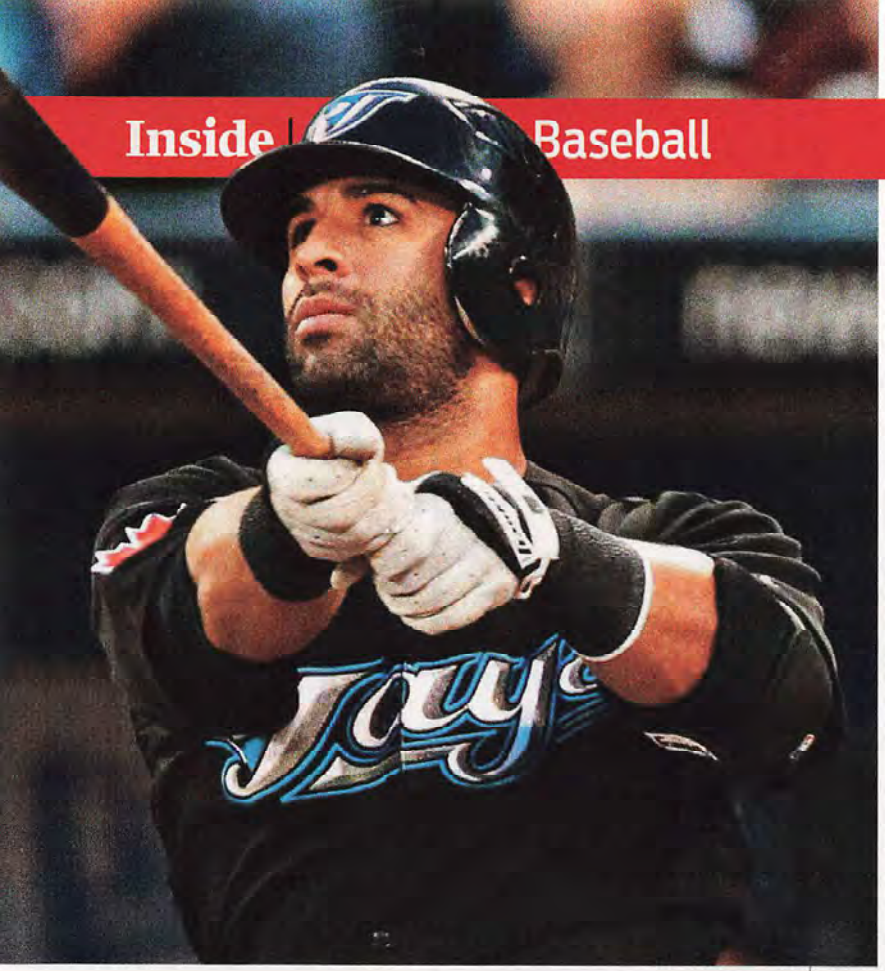
Now on SI.com
Fast Breaks after every U.S. game at the world championships at SI.com/nba

FAST BREAK

Messy Divorce

Carmelo Anthony *(below)* and the Nuggets are headed for a breakup—and it could be drawn out. Anthony, who is entering the final year of his contract, wants to be traded, but no team is going to surrender significant assets without a guarantee that he will stick around for more than one season. So Denver will have to ship Anthony someplace where he would agree to an extension. Sources say he prefers a major market (New York, New Jersey, Los Angeles) or a team with an elite big man (Houston, Orlando). But the Nuggets, who last week hired a new G.M., Masai Ujiri, "are going to wait for the best possible package," says a Western Conference G.M. "And they are willing to wait until February to get it."





EARLY BIRD SPECIAL
Solid contact is easy for Bautista now that he's not late on fastballs.

Rise to Power

By reinventing his swing, late-blooming Jose Bautista turned himself into this year's breakout slugger | BY ALBERT CHEN

He has been traded three times—once for a player to be named later. He has been plucked off waivers and picked up in the Rule 5 draft and never spent more than three years with one organization. And now Jose Bautista, a utility player who before this year had never hit more than 16 home runs in any of his six major league seasons, is on his way to becoming one of history's most unlikely home run champs. At week's end the Blue Jays' slugger had 42 bombs, nine more than the next closest hitter in the American League, Detroit's Miguel Cabrera. It's perhaps the most shocking home run breakout since Brady Anderson hit 50 in 1996, but Bautista, 29, insists, "I always knew I was capable of hitting this many home runs." He pauses, then adds with a smile, "O.K., maybe not this many."

Only three hitters since 1947—Cecil Fielder in '90, Mark McGwire in '87 and Harmon Killebrew in '59—have led their league in home runs after hitting as few the previous season as Bautista did last year (13). Bautista's stunning power surge made him the subject of trade rumors in July, but the Blue Jays held on to their number 3 hitter, convinced that they have a late bloomer in the mold of Rays first baseman Carlos Peña. "It's no fluke," says hitting coach Dwayne Murphy. "Jose has reinvented himself as a hitter."

Before this season Bautista was a career backup who often joked to teammates that he led the league in foul balls. "At least two or three per at bat," he says. "If anyone kept that stat, they would tell you I was the leader." Bautista didn't understand why he struggled to make solid contact, particularly on fastballs inside, until one day last season when Murphy showed him how he was almost always late with his swing. They broke down Bautista's mechanics in front of a mirror in the Blue Jays' weight room. "A lightbulb went on that day," says Bautista, who learned to start his swing sooner, "and suddenly I was able to square up on a lot more balls than I used to."

Toronto's midseason trades last year of outfielder Alex Rios and third baseman Scott Rolen opened up regular playing time for Bautista, and this year his new swing has given him more loft (his 61.1% fly ball rate was fifth highest in baseball) and turned him into a dead pull hitter (none of his home runs had gone the opposite way). "You could beat him with inside fastballs in the past," says an AL advance scout, "but now he hits everything."

Bautista's versatility—he has played all three outfield and both corner infield positions for the Jays—adds to his rising value. He is arbitration eligible this winter and due to become a free agent after 2011, but Toronto hopes to sign him to a long-term deal.

In other words Bautista finally may have found a home. "Maybe if I were put in the right position and had the right coaching, I would have been able to do this earlier," he says. "It just shows, once you get in a groove, you never know what can happen." □

Now on SI.com
Find out which 10 minor league call-ups will be worth watching in September, at **SI.com/mlb**

THE NUMBERS

Off Base

The Cardinals appeared to wrest control of the NL Central by sweeping the Reds in a brawl-marred series in early August. After that, however, St. Louis dropped 10 of 15 games to fall five games out of the division lead and three games out of the wild-card slot through Sunday. Despite outscoring their opponents 72–70, an 0–5 record in one-run games crippled the Cards during that stretch. A running theme in all five losses was a lack of punch atop the order, where **Felipe Lopez**, **Jon Jay** and others have failed to provide enough OBP. Since the Reds series, Cardinals leadoff men and number 2 hitters had a .293 OBP. In the five one-run losses, the two spots combined for a .167 OBP. Having the best player in baseball, **Albert Pujols** *(below)*, is nice, but he needs to bat with runners on for the Cardinals to get the full impact of his talent.

—Joe Sheehan



DARREN CALABRESE/CP/AP (BAUTISTA); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (PUJOLS)



©2010 Cabot All Rights Reserved.

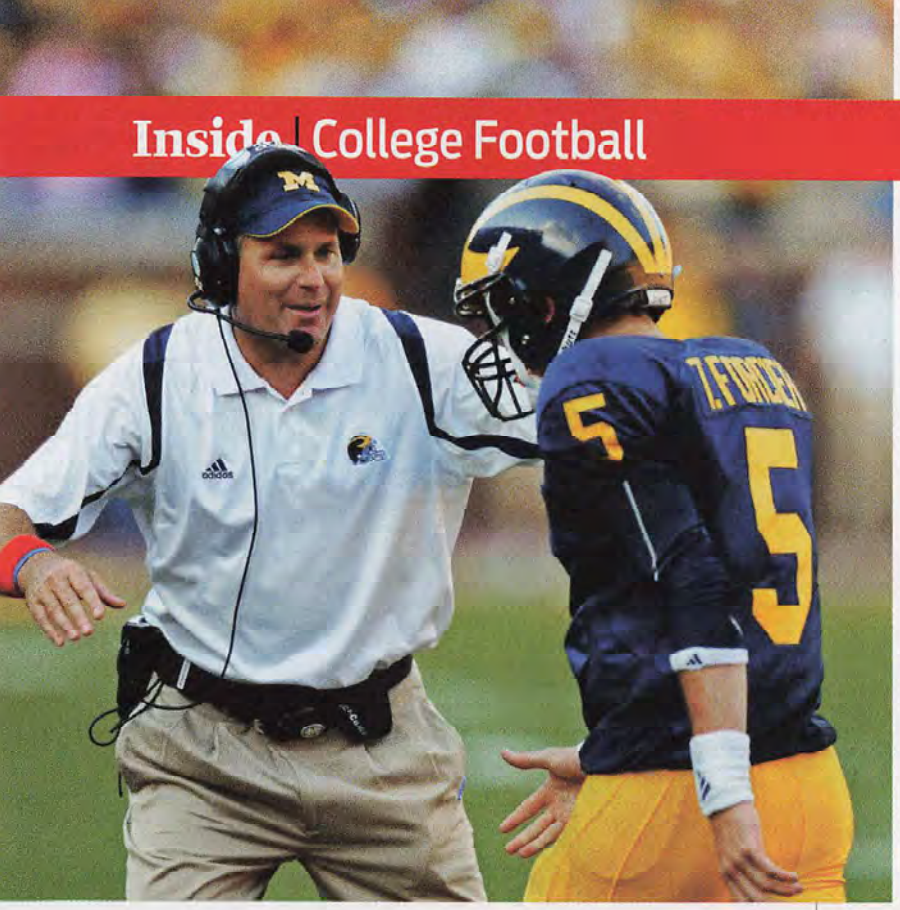
USING CABOT *won't* MAKE YOU *a* PRO. THE RESULTS JUST MAKE YOU *look* LIKE ONE.

People who know wood, know Cabot. Made with only the finest-grade oils and pigments, our stains enhance wood's unique beauty. Making Cabot the right choice for protecting and preserving wood. For over 130 years, you'll find heritage, commitment and pride in every can.

PREMIUM WOODCARE
Cabot
SINCE 1877

OUR PERFORMANCE *is* LEGENDARY.™

CABOTSTAIN.COM



WINGED MAN Rodriguez returned the "wings" to Forcier (5) but has not decided whether to start him or Robinson (below).

Last Stand?

Under fire for reasons on and off the field, Rich Rodriguez enters Week 1 with much already at stake | BY AUSTIN MURPHY

British Petroleum had a worse year than Rich Rodriguez, but not by much. Yet there was Rich Rod, the third-year Michigan coach whose name has become a synonym for *embattled*, bantering cheerfully last week with longtime Wolverines radio color commentator Jim Brandstatter about the glories of two-a-days. "This is our best time of year," said Rodriguez. "Football all day and all night."



There can be no doubting this man's zeal for preparation, as recent headlines have made abundantly clear. Following a lengthy in-house investigation, Michigan announced in May that the program, under Rich Rod's watch, had committed at least four major violations, each related to the coaches' disregard of NCAA limits on practice times. Having admitted guilt, the athletic department recommended that the football program spend two years on probation.

Will Rodriguez survive the widespread calls for his head and be around at the end of those two years? Significant light will be shed on that question starting on Saturday, when the Wolverines host a dangerous Connecticut team that finished last season with four straight wins. How improved is this year's Michigan squad over the 5–7 team that lost seven of eight Big Ten games last season? "We're gonna find out in a hurry," says Rodriguez.

What Michigan fans won't find out until game day is who will begin the season at quarterback. After leading the team to a 4–0 start last year as a freshman, Tate Forcier's fall from grace was downright ... Rodriguez-like. Forcier was, by his own admission, less than fully committed during offseason workouts and was publicly called out by teammates and Rich Rod. The unkindest cut: Early in two-a-days Forcier was one of a handful of Wolverines forced to practice without the iconic "wings" on his helmet, a public shaming meted out to players whose commitment Rodriguez deemed substandard.

Charging through the door left open by Forcier is sophomore Denard Robinson, who relied too heavily on his blazing speed last year. A light went on for Robinson during spring practice: He has looked much more at ease both passing the ball and executing this offense's bread-and-butter play, the zone-read option.

Is the UConn game a must-win? No. But if the Wolverines fail to achieve at least a split in their first two games—they're at Notre Dame in Week 2—the howls for Rich Rod's firing will become very loud indeed. Dave Brandon, Michigan's first-year athletic director, has ridiculed the notion that the coach's job is linked to a victory total. Academics, recruiting and player conduct will also influence his decision, Brandon says.

That said, if Michigan doesn't win at least eight games (possibly seven, if one of the wins is over Ohio State), Rich Rod will be losing more than his wings. □

Now on SI.com
Check out Andy Staples's weekly Power Rankings every Tuesday at **SI.com/cfb**

HIGH STAKES

Kickoff Classics

Like the Michigan-UConn matchup, these season openers also have much on the line.

Boise State–Virginia Tech in Landover, Md. Boise's first real shot at the BCS title game will be busted early if the Broncos can't stop running back Ryan Williams *(below)* and the Hokies in this Labor Day matchup.

Oregon State–TCU in Arlington, Texas. Call it the Resourcefulness Bowl: Beavers coach Mike Riley and Frogs coach Gary Patterson are two of the best at maximizing talent.

LSU–North Carolina in Atlanta. Les Miles and his underachieving Tigers need this game, but perhaps not as desperately as the Heels, now being investigated for NCAA rules violations, stemming from possible agent and academic improprieties.



JOHN BIEVER (RODRIGUEZ AND FORCIER); TONY DINGAL (ROBINSON); ANDREW HANCOCK

© 2016 Fruit of the Loom, Inc.



UNDERWEAR FOR EVERY MAN.

Brief

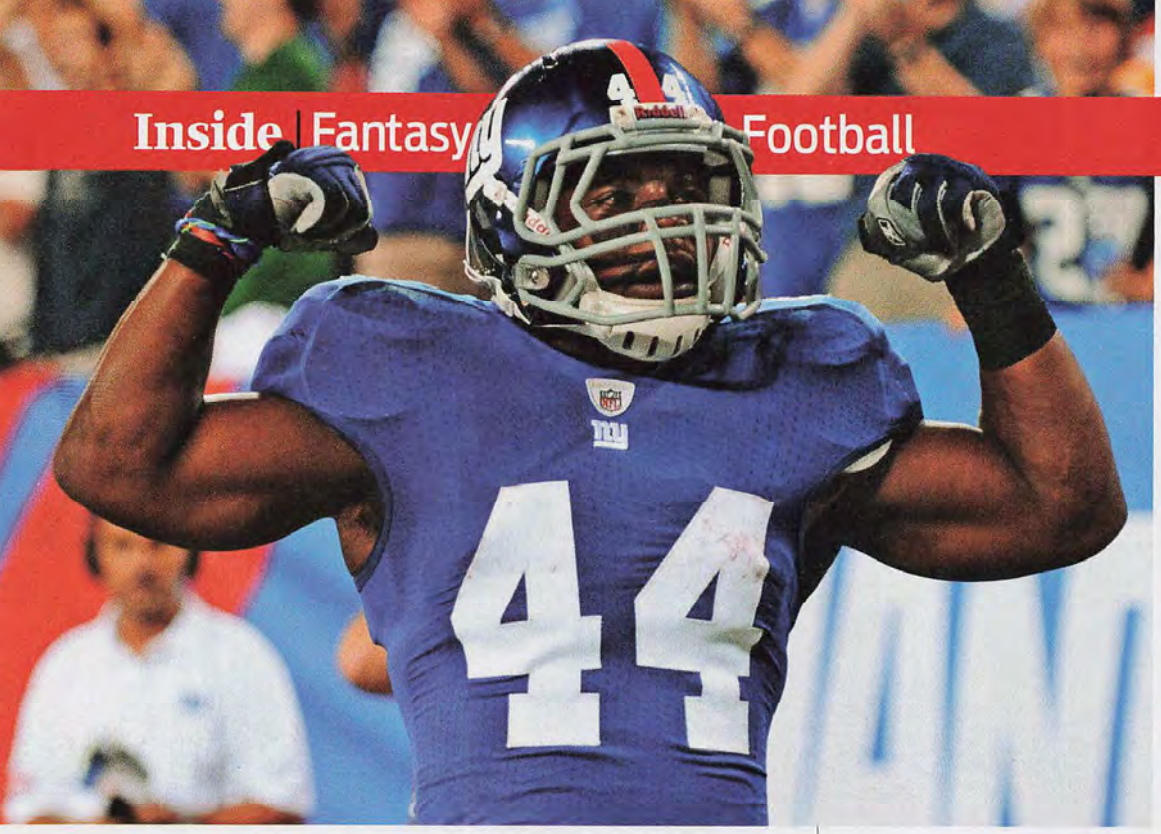
Trunk

Boxer Brief

Boxer

FRUIT OF THE LOOM®

fruitguyfans.com



Early Risers

As rosters and roles come into focus, these players are looking even better than they did when practice started | BY DAVID SABINO

Every training camp a few unexpected names bubble to the top of fantasy consciousness. The three players below are by no means unknowns, but they have stepped up this summer to become larger figures on the landscape than they were a few weeks ago.

Ahmad Bradshaw, RB, Giants
Among the highest-profile position battles of this summer has been the clash between two Giants running backs, the bruising Brandon Jacobs and the elusive Bradshaw, now fully recovered from off-season surgeries to both feet and his right ankle. Since Bradshaw entered the NFL in 2007 as a seventh-round pick from Marshall, only three running backs with more than 250 carries—Jamaal Charles of the Chiefs (5.7), Tennessee's Chris Johnson (5.3) and Carolina's DeAngelo Williams (5.3)—have gained more yards per attempt (5.2). And in '09 the 5' 9", 198-pound Bradshaw was a more productive red-zone runner than the 6' 4", 264-pound Jacobs, scoring seven times on 28 carries inside the 20, while Jacobs went five for 46. The two will share carries again this year, but the split will be more even and Bradshaw could eventually take the lead. Grab Bradshaw as early as the fourth round and Jacobs a few rounds later.

Arian Foster, RB, Texans
With Matt Schaub and Andre Johnson already in place as the league's top pass-and-catch combination, the only thing the Texans' offense lacked entering camp was a lead runner. Foster's 18-carry, 110-yard performance against the Cowboys on Saturday made it clear that he is that man. At the end of last season the undrafted second-year player from Tennessee rose from the practice squad to total 216 yards and three scores in wins against Miami and New England. This year he excelled from the first days of camp, drawing praise from the coaching staff and his Pro Bowl quarterback. "When he's in there, he shows a lot of maturity," said Schaub. "We've got confidence that he can be a physical runner." To get Foster, wait no later than the third or fourth round.

Greg Camarillo, WR, Vikings
Acquired last week in a trade with Miami, Camarillo is being asked to fill in for the Vikings' top receiver, Sidney Rice, who'll be sidelined for at least the first third of the season following hip surgery. Last season Camarillo was thrown to 71 times, and he caught 50 balls without dropping a single catchable pass—the best such performance in the league. (He has 113 catches without a drop in his career.) Favre throws one of the hardest fastballs in league history, so good hands are a must in Minnesota. Camarillo will have the old man's confidence before long. Take him as a fourth wideout with the potential of a top-two pass catcher. □

BIG MOMENT Although small, Bradshaw (above) excelled near the goal line, and he can tear off long gains, too.

Now on SI.com
More fantasy tips from Maurice Jones-Drew every Friday at **SI.com/fantasy**



MAURICE JONES-DREW

Giving Props

Every week the Jaguars' running back will call out his top fantasy performers.

Bruce Gradkowski The Raiders' backup QB tossed for 202 yards (14 of 22) and two TDs, including a 74-yarder to Louis Murphy.

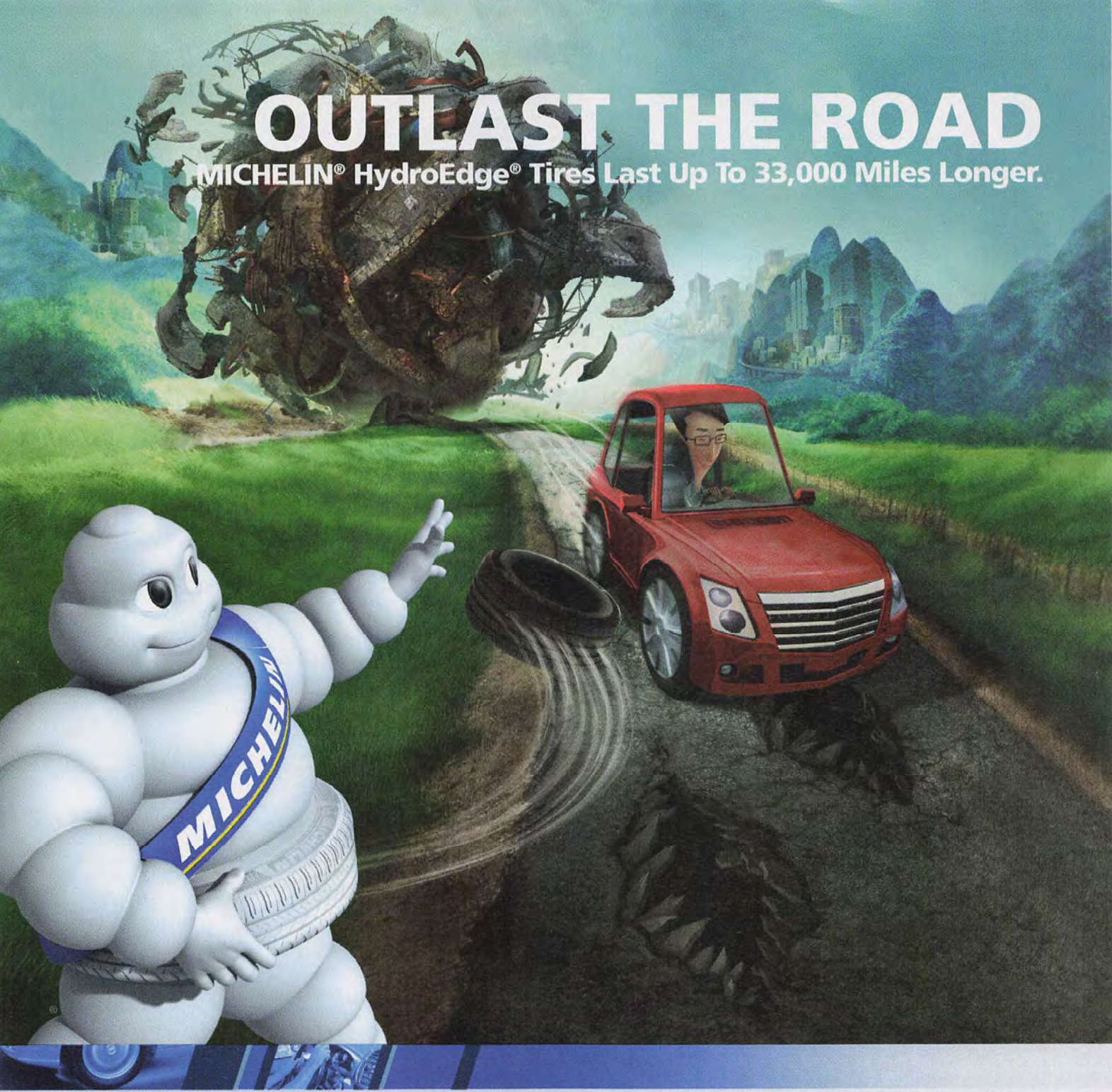
Ndamukong Suh The big rookie's face mask and head throw of Jake Delhomme was borderline dirty, but with it Suh *(below)* showed out as a hard-nosed throwback.

Frank Gore The Pro Bowl back proved he's in top form. His first carry of the preseason went for 49 yards. He came out for the night soon after, so he'll be fresh for the real deal.

The officials With his new spot on the field, the umpire couldn't get in position fast enough when Indianapolis was in its hurry-up offense. It was the best defense played against Peyton Manning to date.



NEWSDAY/MCT/LANDOV (BRADSHAW); JEFFREY GELLER/ICON SMI (JONES-DREW); PETER READ MILLER (SUH)



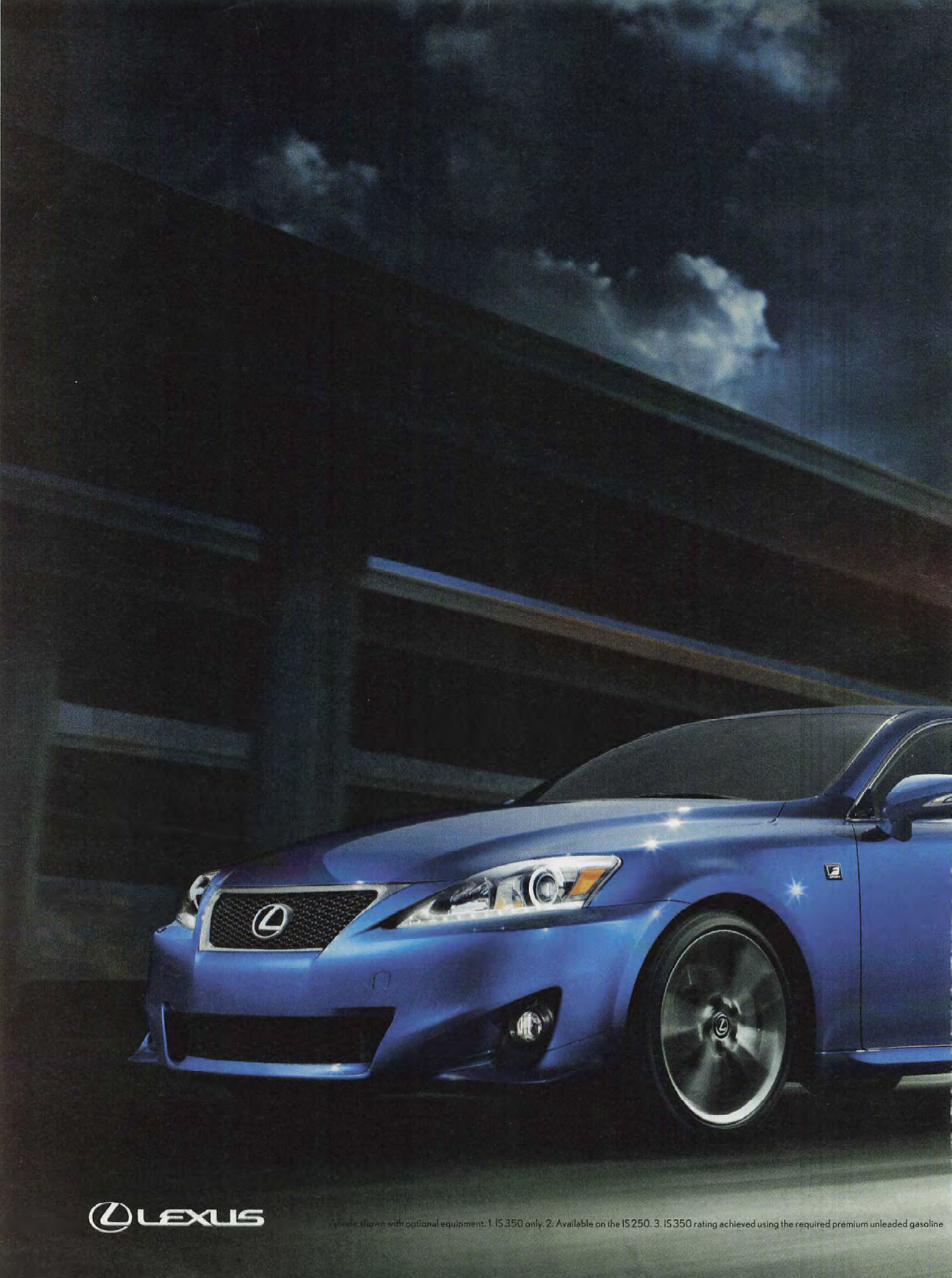
MICHELIN® HydroEdge® tires:

LONGEVITY	STOPPING DISTANCE	FUEL EFFICIENCY
LAST UP TO **33,000** MILES LONGER THAN A LEADING COMPETITOR[1]	STOP UP TO **14'** SHORTER IN WET CONDITIONS THAN A LEADING COMPETITOR[2]	**#1** IN CATEGORY[3]

Go the distance with MICHELIN® HydroEdge® tires. MICHELIN HydroEdge tires last up to 33,000 miles longer than the leading competitor,[1] saving you money by replacing your tires less often. In addition, the MICHELIN HydroEdge tire stops up to 14 feet shorter in wet conditions than the leading competitor[2] and is the most fuel efficient tire in the category.[3] See how the right tire changes everything at **michelinman.com/lastlonger.**

MICHELIN
A better way forward

1- Based on commissioned third-party wear test results versus the Goodyear® Assurance® TripleTred™ and Assurance® ComforTred®.
2- Based on third-party wet braking test results versus the Goodyear® Assurance® ComforTred® product line in wet testing.
3- Comparisons based upon fuel efficiency testing between MICHELIN® HydroEdge® tires, Goodyear® Assurance® TripleTred™ tires, Goodyear® Assurance® ComforTred® tires, and Bridgestone® Turanza® EL400 tires. Fuel savings are estimates based on comparative rolling resistance. Actual on-road savings may vary. Based on comparisons against the leading competitors in the standard S/T-rated all-season category. Copyright ©2010 Michelin North America, Inc. All rights reserved.



LEXUS

Vehicle shown with optional equipment. 1. IS 350 only. 2. Available on the IS 250. 3. IS 350 rating achieved using the required premium unleaded gasoline

lexus.com/ISprecision

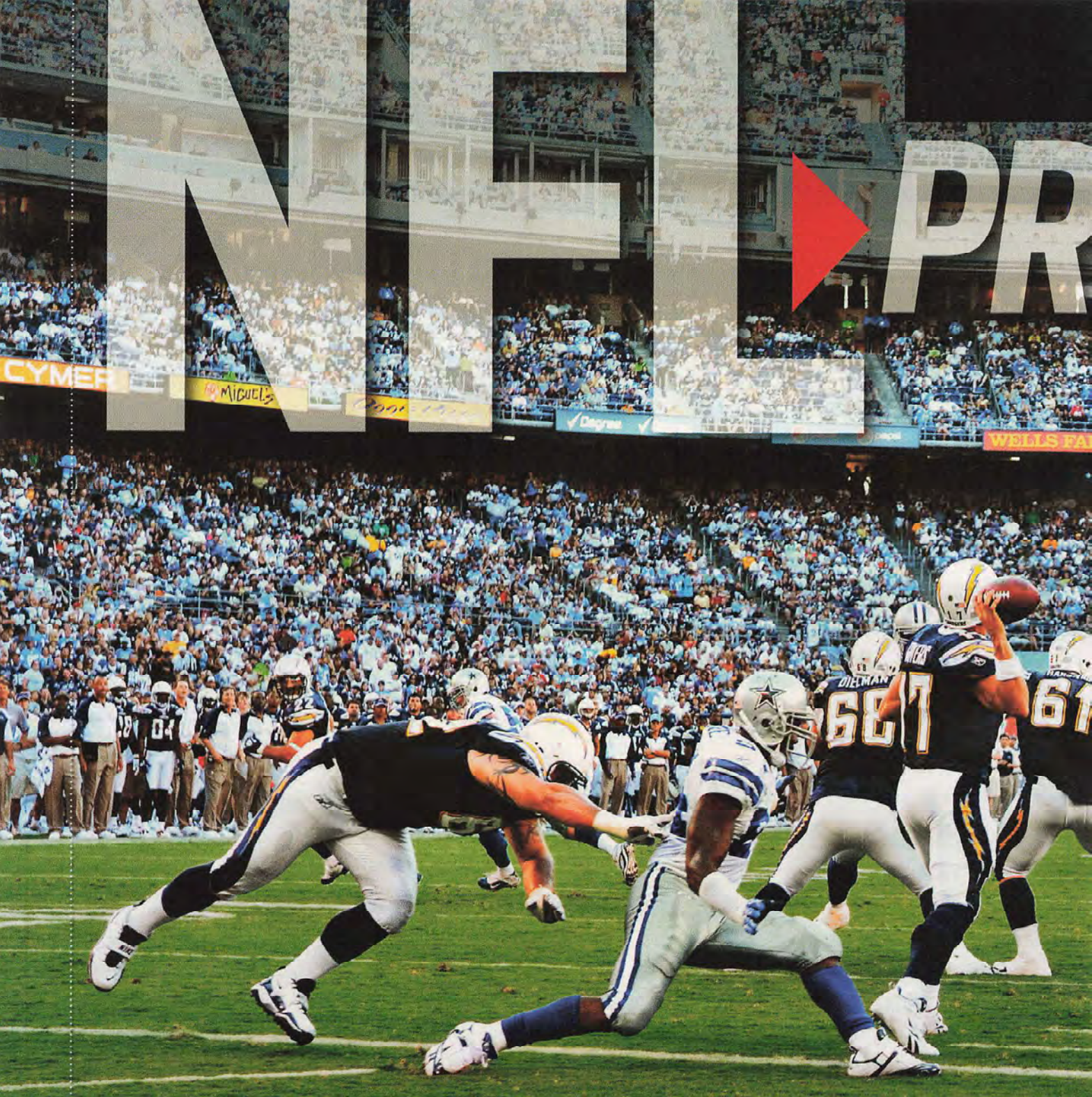
PICK YOUR METAPHOR



The Lexus IS is built on the belief that performance without precision isn't performance at all. That's why we gave it available F Sport™-tuned suspension to hug the hairpin turns even tighter. Four-piston brake calipers[1] to help you stop on a dime. And race-inspired paddle shifters[2] for threading the needle. Because when it comes to performance, what good is 306 horsepower[3] if it isn't wielded with precision?

The new 2011 Lexus IS. Wield Precision.

with an octane rating of 91 or higher. If premium fuel is not used, performance will decrease. ©2010 Lexus.

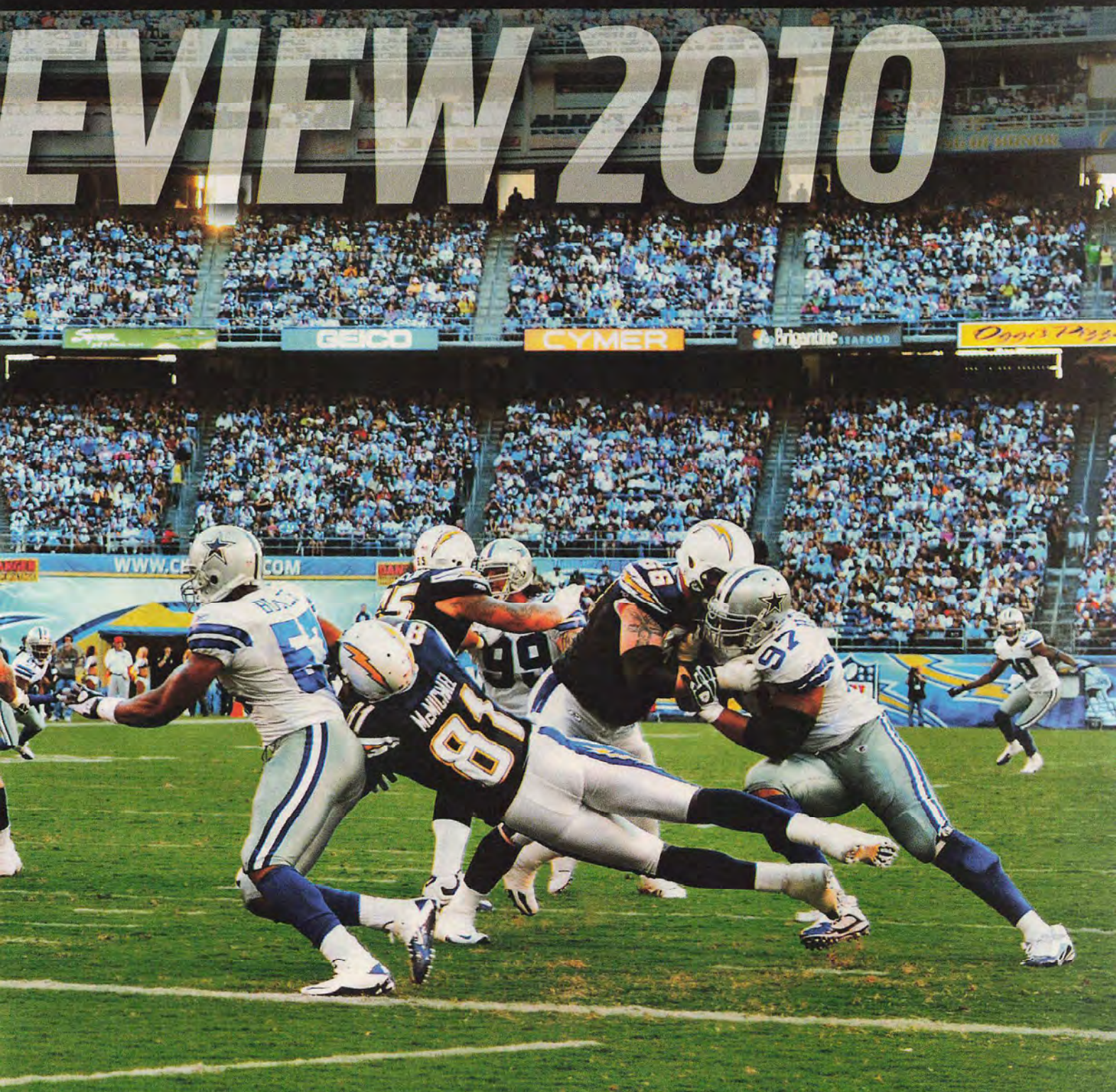


CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

BY PETER KING

THE SNAP OF THE BALL SETS OFF A

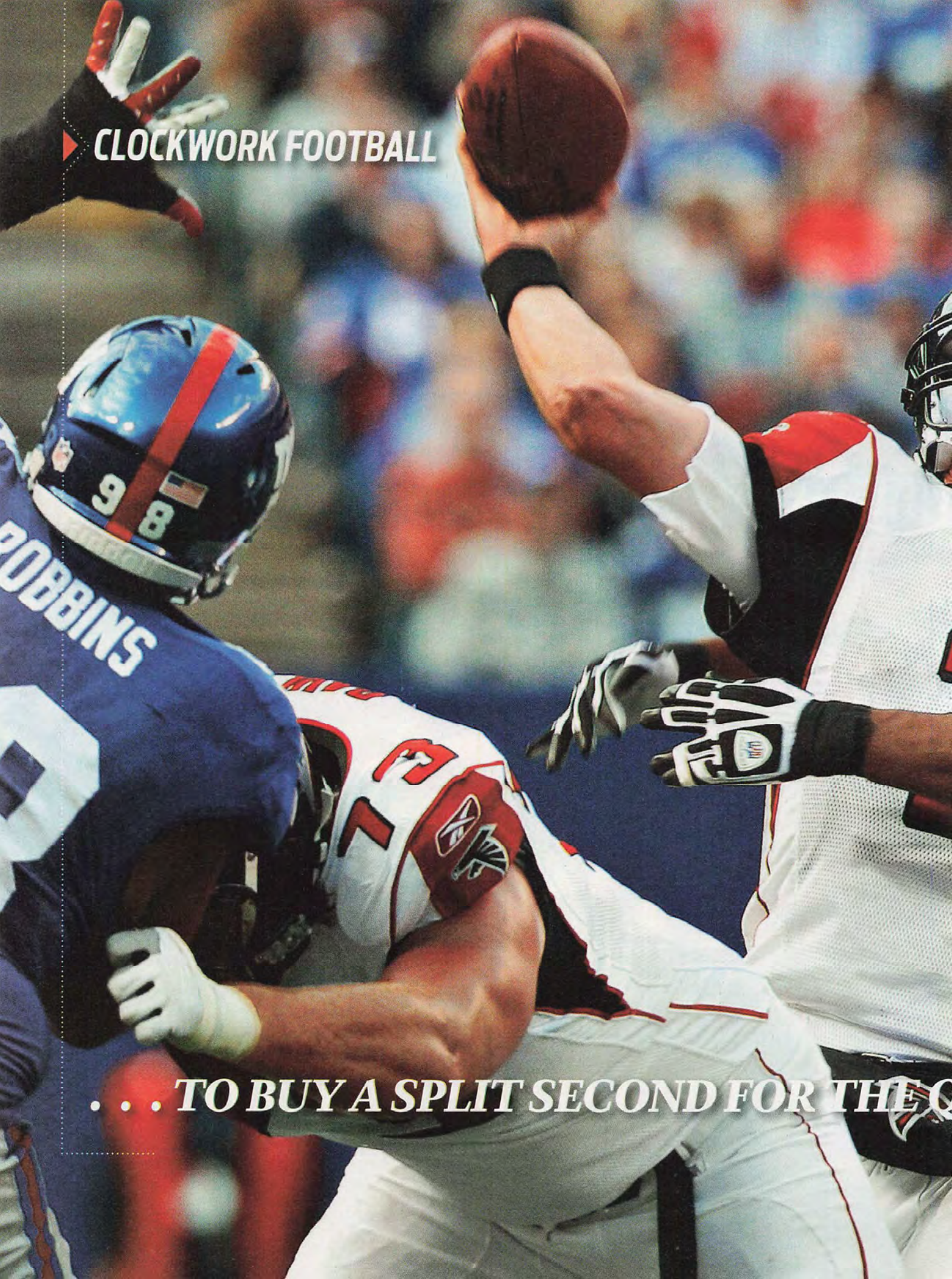
EVIEW 2010



TIMER—AND A SERIES OF BATTLES . . .

CONTROLLED CHAOS
By the time Chargers QB Philip Rivers has taken his drop of three or five steps—forget seven—the pocket is collapsing because of pass rushers like Cowboys linebacker DeMarcus Ware (left).

Photograph by ROBERT BECK



. . . TO BUY A SPLIT SECOND FOR THE Q



UARTERBACK OR STEAL IT FROM HIM . . .

ARMS RACE
The Falcons' Matt Ryan is one of the league's best at reading the defense and releasing the ball before the likes of Giants end Osi Umenyiora (right) can disrupt his precision attack.

Photograph by JIM McISAAC/GETTY IMAGES



. . . AND WITHIN THREE SECONDS, A



PLAY IS WON OR LOST. TICK. TICK. TICK.

ONWARD AND UPWARD
The pressure on Denver's Andre Goodman (21) and his fellow cornerbacks has never been greater—and the value of a game-breaking receiver like the Lions' Calvin Johnson never higher.

Photograph by PETER READ MILLER

It's a warm summer morning at 49ers training camp in Santa Clara, Calif., and the team is running seven-on-seven drills, with no defensive linemen. Behind the offense sits a scoreboard clock set at five seconds—the same five-second timer that San Francisco has used in most organized team practices over the past year. When the ball is snapped, the countdown begins: :05 . . . :04 . . . :03. . . . At :02, a horn blows. The clock keeps running. At :00, the horn blows again.

The purpose? The Niners want their quarterback, Alex Smith, to get rid of the ball before the first horn—that is, in less than three seconds. And they want him to know that after five seconds, the play is effectively over.

Smith takes a snap and looks through his progression of receivers. :04 . . . :03. . . . He cocks his arm and prepares to throw . . . :02. *RRRRRRRNNNNNT!* "Get rid of it!" offensive coordinator Jimmy Raye yells.

Three snaps later: Smith scans the field. His receivers are covered. *RRRRRRRNNNNNT!* Smith throws the ball away at :01. "Get rid of it!" Raye yells.

For the sixth straight summer Smith, the No. 1 pick in the 2005 draft, is trying to win the Niners' quarterback job. All summer he's been hearing two things in his sleep. That damn horn, drilling into his head over and over that in the NFL a passer must release the ball in three seconds or he'll get creamed. And Raye's not-so-soothing directive that emphasizes the message. "It's to the point now that I say it to myself," Smith says. "It's ingrained in me. In today's football it has to be."

CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

SMITH HEARS THAT HORN IN HIS SLEEP, DRILLING INTO HIS HEAD THAT A PASSER MUST GET RID OF THE BALL QUICKLY OR GET CREAMED.



MANO A MANO
As the edge rush gets more dangerous, stock in premier left tackles like the Browns' Joe Thomas (73) has soared.

FRED VUICH



CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

AS OFFENSES SPREAD THE FIELD, "IF YOU DON'T CHANGE EVERY YE

Today's football is not merely a chess match. (Four coaches and two players, unprompted, called it that in interviews for this story.) It's speed chess. Every move by an offensive strategist prompts a countermove by the defense, one side trying to buy time, the other trying to hurry it. Pitted against an ever-increasing number of three- and four-receiver sets, the defense decries the rules changes that have produced the most efficient passing attacks in the NFL's 90-year history. It responds less with brute force than with deception. The middle linebacker positions himself outside the right end; both safeties sprint to the line, showing blitz; defensive backs flood the gaps in the O-line just before the snap. Or waves of defenders shuffle and switch spots on the field seemingly at random. "Smart moves," says Colts quarterback Peyton Manning, "designed to get me to have no idea what they're going to be doing at the snap of the ball. Much smarter than they used to be."

As defenses sow more confusion, they also bring more pressure, forcing quarterbacks to reduce their traditional seven-step drops to five steps or three. From the moment a quarterback gets the ball to the instant he releases, the elapsed time is, on average, 2.4 seconds. A team attempts 33 passes per game. In the course of a game, that's 80 seconds of roiling action and high-pressure decision-making, during which man-to-man battles that can determine success or failure are taking place all across the field. Edge rusher versus left tackle. Blocking back versus blitzing safety. Game-breaking receiver versus shutdown corner. Processing it all is the quarterback, who must sense where the pressure is coming from as he drops back (*tick . . .*), run through his series of targets (*tick . . . tick . . .*) and release the ball before he's crushed (*tick . . . tick . . . tick*).



INDYFENSIBLE
The Colts' offense, with sure-handed targets like tight end Dallas Clark finding space and Peyton Manning orchestrating, typifies the modern attack.

The Colts are paying Manning $15.8 million this year to win those 80 seconds. The Bears will pay free-agent pass rusher Julius Peppers *(page 58)* $20 million this season to win those 80 seconds. The Ravens traded for a receiver, Anquan Boldin, and are paying him more than they're giving running backs Ray Rice, Willis McGahee and LeRon McClain combined—to win those 80 seconds. The Raiders are paying cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha $15.1 million, more than all but two starting quarterbacks, to win those 80 seconds. Jets cornerback Darelle Revis argues for quarterback-type money, too, because he wins those 80 seconds.

Check out the first draft choices of the Giants and the Saints, two of the past three Super Bowl winners, since 2004. New York has gone quarterback, cornerback, pass rusher, corner, safety, wide receiver, pass rusher. The Saints: pass rusher, offensive tackle, running back (though an edge player, Reggie Bush), wide receiver, defensive tackle, cornerback, cornerback. Of those 14 picks, 13 play instrumental roles in spurring or stopping the passing game.

The running game is not quite ancient history, but it's yesterday's football. The four leading rushers last year played for teams that went a combined 25–29. The teams with the four highest-rated passers were 40–15. "We all grew up with the mantra that you've got to run the ball and stop the run to win," says Baltimore coach John Harbaugh. "When I coached in Philadelphia a few years ago, [the late defensive coordinator] Jim Johnson used to say, 'Come on, they can't beat you with the run. But they can always beat you with the pass. Screw the run!' That was eight, nine years ago. He was ahead of his time."

Back to Niners camp. San Francisco has given up 150 sacks over the past three seasons. Smith's arm isn't strong enough to make the deep sideline throws under pressure that Brett Favre or Jay Cutler can make. Those two facts have convinced Raye that Smith must beat the D to the punch—throw fast or die. Defenses are sending pressure from odd looks; Raye's gambit in the chess match is to make Smith so quick with his decisions and his throws that the only rushers who can get to him are those who come in unblocked. A quick-release spread attack that relies on efficiency rather than arm strength is Smith's best chance to succeed.

In Week 2 of the preseason San Francisco faced the Vikings, who led the NFL in sacks last year. Smith, with Raye's commandment—*Get rid of it!*—running through his head, was playing the game in fast motion. He took his snaps, went through his reads decisively and was pressured into rolling out only once in 13 attempts. All but one of those 13 throws got out in 2.8 seconds or less. (The rollout took 3.6 seconds.) Smith completed nine of 13 throws without a sack and led a crisp 70-yard touchdown drive against Minnesota's first-unit defense on the game's first possession. On that series Smith connected with five different receivers; none of his passes trav-

JAMES LANG/US PRESSWIRE

eled more than 13 yards past the line of scrimmage. "I felt my reads were quick all night," Smith said. "You can see the kind of rhythm we can get into when we're quick with the decisions."

That kind of efficiency is playing out leaguewide. Passing accuracy has risen steadily in the last decade and climbed above 60% for the first time in NFL history in 2007 *(page 56)*. The number of 4,000-yard passers is skyrocketing—from three in 2000 to 10 last season. Offenses have spread the field, defenses are rushing to adjust, and offenses are adjusting to those adjustments.

Over the past decade the Steelers have been in the top 10 in total defense every year; four times they've led the league. Still, coordinator Dick LeBeau, who's been with the team since 2004, changes a significant portion of his playbook each season. "Twenty percent of what people will see of us this year they've never seen before," says LeBeau. "If you don't change something every year, with everyone studying you, you'll lose."

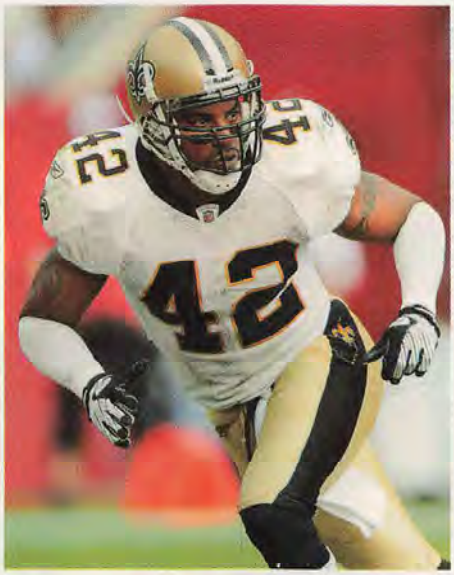
DEFENSES RUSH TO ADJUST. AR," SAYS LEBEAU, "YOU LOSE."

Because offenses have only split seconds to deliver, they have turned to low-risk, short-passing games. Why did Favre, at 40, have his most accurate (68.4%) and efficient (107.2 passer rating) season ever? Why did he throw just seven interceptions when he'd never had fewer than 13 in his 17 previous years as a starter? Because he released the ball quickly, and because he had so many open targets that he knew if he checked down to an outlet receiver on second down, he'd find Vikings receivers Percy Harvin or Sidney Rice open downfield on third. "Maybe it's wisdom late in his career," says Minnesota coach Brad Childress, "but he was perfect week after week in taking what was there."

The teams that beat Favre were the ones that best disguised their intentions. At Carolina in Week 15, the Panthers thought they'd have an edge if they could match cat-quick defensive end Everette Brown, a part-time player, against mammoth Vikings left tackle Bryant McKinnie, who normally would be across from Julius Peppers. On a third-down play during Minnesota's first possession, Carolina flipped Peppers to the left side and moved Brown across from McKinnie. The Panthers also walked two linebackers down to the line, forcing the Vikings to devote blockers to the 'backers at the snap, whether they were coming or not. Minnesota helped on Peppers with an extra blocker, and Brown got McKinnie one-on-one. He speed-rushed McKinnie and sacked Favre. "That got 'em thinking," says Panthers coach John Fox, "and then they didn't play as fast as usual." Favre was sacked three more times that day and failed to throw a touchdown pass in a 26–7 loss.

When the Vikings analyzed the Saints on video before the NFC Championship Game, Minnesota's coaches rarely saw New Orleans free safety Darren Sharper blitzing and never saw him rush through the A gap—the space on either side of the center. So what happened in the title game? Sharper blitzed four times through the A gap, sacking Favre once with a rib-crunching hit that shook the last row of the Superdome. "We were determined to hit him over and over and make him feel it," Sharper said, and everyone in the New Orleans locker room believed that the physical impact of those disguised blitzes played a role in Favre's foolish final throw, the interception that was vital to the Saints' victory.

In chess, it helps to know your opponents. Saints defensive coordinator Gregg Williams was confident that the Vikings wouldn't have seen Sharper on an A gap blitz because he had debriefed the veteran safety on Minnesota's scouting tendencies when Sharper signed with the Saints from the Vikings before the '09 season. Williams learned that Minnesota's coaches weren't likely to go back and watch every snap of New Orleans's defense from the regular season. (A source confirmed that the Vikes watched video from eight Saints games.) Williams hadn't sent Sharper through the A gap since September, and if the Vikes hadn't seen that, it was all the more reason to send him, often, in the biggest game of the year.



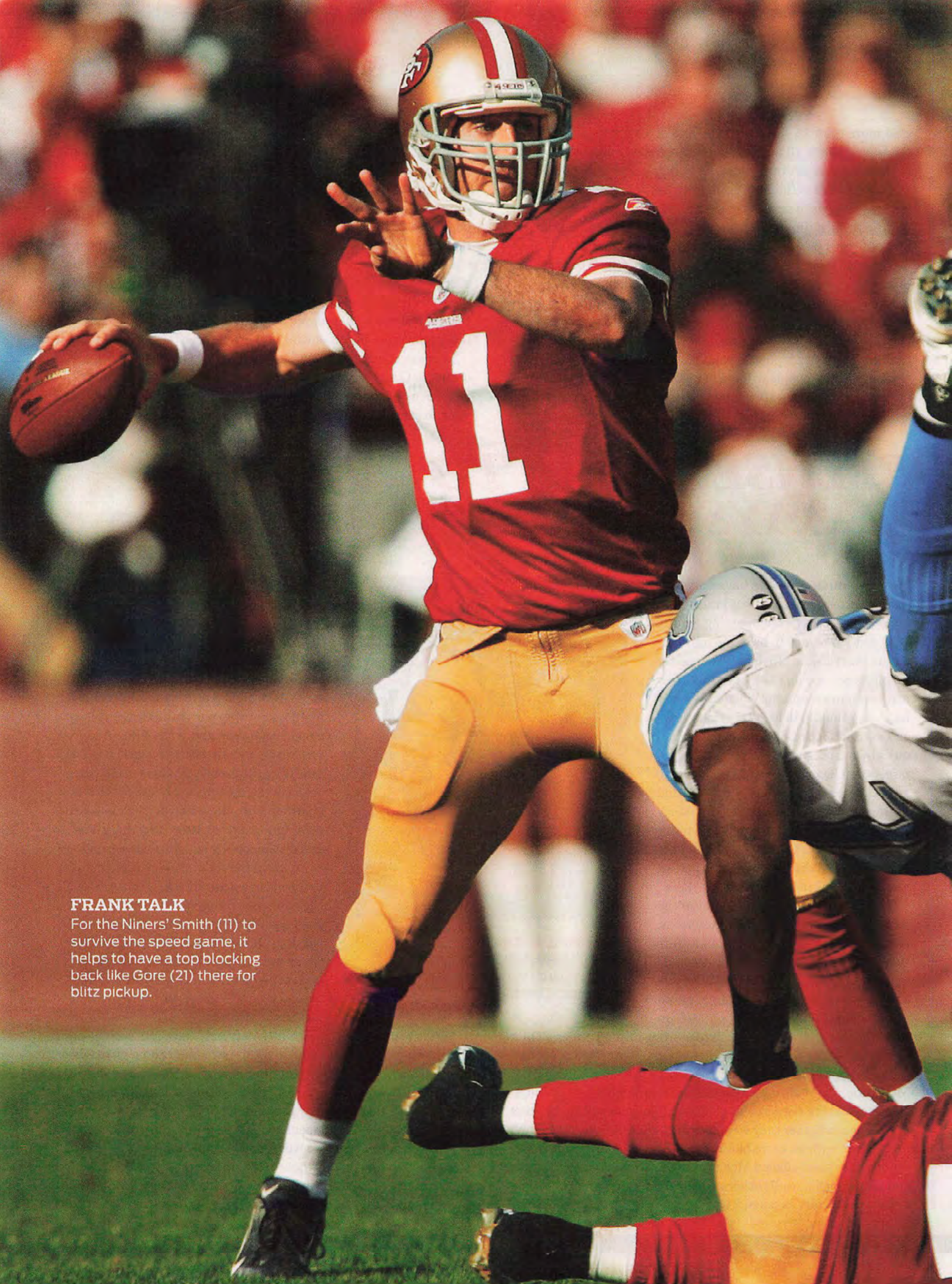
DECEPTION GAME
The Saints love to bring Sharper from his free safety spot up to the line to give the quarterback pause—and, at times, to deliver a hit on a blitz.

Of course, if Favre had released the ball before the hit, then Sharper would have been out of the picture, and the Vikes' speedy wideouts would be running single-covered up the field. "A play like that is upsetting to a quarterback," Fox says, "especially to one who prides himself in being able to see it coming, make changes and pick it up. If the Vikings have prepared for 20 different blitzes in practice all week, the defense has the hammer with the one they haven't seen. It's not just the offense that can be creative now."

"I like guys who play with no safety net," says Jets coach Rex Ryan. "To play like that you've got to have guts. Some guys will play, say, fire zones, dropping linemen or linebackers back as landmarks. I never have thought of those things as risky. But you rush guys through that [A] gap without help, and you make the play, that's a killer. It happens too fast for a quarterback to react. But you better be able to cover if you're doing that."

Two last points about those newfangled assaults up the gut. First, there's a premium on backs who selflessly pick up blitzes—San Francisco's Frank Gore, for one. "He's the best I've seen since

HEINZ KLUETMEIER



FRANK TALK
For the Niners' Smith (11) to survive the speed game, it helps to have a top blocking back like Gore (21) there for blitz pickup.



TONY AVELAR/AP

CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

Marcus Allen," says Jimmy Raye of Gore, a 1,000-yard rusher in each of his last four seasons. "We don't have to sub for him on third down because we're not worried about him picking up a blitzing 'backer or the rush end." And second, some teams now drop their centers behind the line of scrimmage and use them like sweepers—Baltimore's Matt Birk, for instance, who will step back against rush-heavy defenses, looking for an end or linebacker to clean up.

The offense wins its share of the battles. In 2007 the Eagles were preparing to face the Giants with a green left tackle, Winston Justice, filling in for the injured Tra Thomas. Philadelphia coach Andy Reid fretted that the scheme that week didn't provide enough leftside help against New York's quick edge rushers. Reid asked his offensive staffers if they were confident Justice would be able to hold up, especially in single blocking sets against the rangy, athletic Osi Umenyiora. The assistants told him they'd get it blocked up. "I signed off on it," Reid recalled this summer. "I'm the coach, so it's on me."

New York sacked Donovan McNabb 12 times, tying the NFL single-game record. Not only did the Giants attack Justice—Umenyiora had six sacks—but they also often lined up two rushers over the A gaps and got pressure from the inside. Reid was steamed.

Before their second game with the Giants that season, the Eagles made changes, most important, narrowing their offensive formation. Instead of splitting their receivers wide on most downs, they brought them closer to the tackles and tight end, almost as slot receivers. And Philly assigned all of its potential receivers—backs, tight ends, wideouts—to chip-blocking duty. A chip can be a quick half-block on a defensive player, a nudge with an outstretched hand or an elbow to the side on the way out in the route. Anything to throw a pass rusher off his preferred path and buy the quarterback a precious tick or two.

"From the first snap of that second game," says Giants defensive lineman Justin Tuck, "all we saw was seven-man protection, with wide receivers chipping. That's not something you see much of at all. And the best guy, by far, was [wideout] Jason Avant—the most annoying person I've ever run into on a football field. He did something on almost every snap to knock one of us off our rush."

The Giants got to McNabb three times in that second game in 2007—not great protection, but a huge improvement. Since then Reid has kept up the chippiness. In five games over next two seasons, including a playoff matchup, Philly allowed just three more sacks, total, and went 4–1. Tuck, who had two of the dozen sacks in that '07 game, has not had one against the Eagles since.

When told this summer that he was the most annoying person in Justin Tuck's world, Avant smiled. He's a journeyman who's had 103 catches in four seasons in Philadelphia. "I pride myself on being a complete receiver," Avant says. "And that's part of my job. In our society, for some reason, people think

they should get paid more for just doing their job. That's part of my job. I don't expect a bunch of credit for it."

What makes the task tougher is that Avant and the other receivers are asked to chip on the rushers—and still run their regular routes, on time. "We don't think it's impossible to do because our route system is not that difficult," says Avant. "And for the quarterback it's huge. It allows him to buy the time he needs to make the play."

"Ninety-nine percent of the time," says Tuck, "after an end is chipped his play's over. Might as well save yourself for the next rush."

Checkmate, Eagles? Not so fast. Tuck says he worked this off-season on hand and arm movements designed to better fend off the chips. He wouldn't give specifics—he'd like to win some of those battles with the pesky Avant when they meet on Nov. 21.

CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

"YOU CAN'T PLAY GOOD DEFENSE CORNERS," SAYS GRUDEN. "FOUR

Two-receiver sets used to be the rule in the NFL. Now they're the exception. In 2009, according to a study by FootballOutsiders.com, three or more wide receivers lined up on 49.2% of offensive snaps; there were two wideouts on 38.6%. That disparity explains why Ryan would prefer having a shutdown corner to an elite pass rusher. "There's a saying I like: You can get beat fastest in the NFL by your quarterback and your cornerback," Ryan says. "I've rushed with a lot of different guys over the years and been successful. But if I can play man coverage with my corners, it allows me to do a lot more up front."

With the all-world Revis on the roster, the Jets might not have been expected to stockpile corners in the off-season. But in March, New York traded for the Chargers' Antonio Cromartie, a former top coverman, and in April it spent its top draft choice on Boise State corner Kyle Wilson.

"No team can play good defense today without three good corners," says former Raiders and Bucs coach Jon Gruden.

"Four," says Tennessee's Jeff Fisher, the league's longest-tenured coach. "I want four corners. You sell yourself short if you stop at three."

The week after Broncos wideout Brandon Marshall set the NFL record for receptions in a game, with 21 at Indianapolis last season, Denver visited Oakland. Asomugha was isolated on Marshall on all the Raiders' man coverages in that game, about 40 snaps, and he held the Denver receiver to zero receptions. On the dozen or so snaps in which the Raiders went zone, the Broncos shifted Marshall away from Asomugha's area, and Marshall had seven catches for 73 yards and a touchdown.

Many around the league were dumbfounded in 2009 when the



CONNECTIVITY In the past three years Aaron Rodgers and his QB brethren have been more accurate than ever.

JOHN BIEVER

ON YOUR MARK

Thanks to the proliferation of spread offenses, quarterbacks are finding their targets more accurately, more efficiently and more quickly. Leaguewide, completion percentage and passer rating have been climbing over the past 10 seasons, while teams' average sack totals have dropped by more than five.

YEAR	COMP. PCT.	PASSER RATING	SACKS PER TEAM
2000	58.2	78.1	39.7
2001	59.0	78.5	38.6
2002	59.6	80.4	36.7
2003	58.8	78.3	34.1
2004	59.8	82.8	37.4
2005	59.5	80.1	36.9
2006	59.8	80.4	36.3
2007	61.2	82.6	34.4
2008	61.0	83.2	32.4
2009	60.9	83.0	34.4

Raiders gave Asomugha a three-year contract worth $45.3 million. And through the summer, those same people wailed that the Jets should stand firm against Revis's demand to be paid even more than Asomugha. But in today's game those two deserve it. If there are a dozen quarterbacks capable of lighting up a great defense on any given Sunday, and only two truly great corners out there who can free up coordinators to get really creative, it's not foolish to pay those cornerbacks like quarterbacks.

As for the future, expect the offense's edge to increase. "If you watch the game today," Baltimore's Harbaugh says, "you notice that if there's a collision—a receiver running into a cover man—it's the job of the corner to get out of the way. The call's going to go against the defensive player. So we're coach-

WITHOUT THREE ' SAYS FISHER.

ing the corners now, 'Don't touch the receiver going downfield.' "

Don't touch the receiver?

"Right," he said. "Run the route, play the ball, don't hand-check. That's the only chance we have to not put the game in the hands of the officials. When I see pass interference called now, it's not just about the way the game is played. It's about the way it's officiated."

Not only that, but the spread is, well, spreading. "We've started doing it," says Asomugha. "I don't remember us doing it last year."

In a preseason game on Aug. 28 in Oakland, Asomugha faced another team of spread converts, Smith's 49ers. A year ago San Francisco was more of a classic two-back, two-receiver team in the image of its conservative, Ditka-disciple coach, Mike Singletary. But the combination of better weapons outside—blossoming second-year receiver Michael Crabtree and free-agent speedster Ted Ginn Jr.—and a smart quarterback getting comfortable with his decision-making convinced the coaching staff that the spread was the right scheme. If you can protect your quarterback (using a good blocker like Gore in the backfield), if you can trust him to release the ball quickly and if you have good targets for him to hit downfield, it just makes sense to have a third wideout on the field rather than a fullback.

Smith played the first half of San Francisco's 28–24 win, following a game plan similar to one he'd have in the regular season. The 49ers steered clear of Asomugha, throwing at him only once in 30 minutes; Asomugha was called for holding Ginn on that play. "The game plan's totally different against a guy like Nnamdi," Smith said afterward. "Why throw to his side?" Advantage, Raiders.

Overall, though, for the second straight week Smith satisfied Raye's *Get rid of it!* exhortation. He wasn't Drew Brees—nine of 15, 113 yards, one TD—but he once again avoided getting sacked or intercepted. Smith left at halftime with a 17–14 lead. Advantage, Niners.

"We've evolved," said Smith. "We can play three wides, get guys in space, throw it all over the field, and we think we can win playing that way." Precision football as a way to beat the clock. Your move, defense. □

KYLE TERADA/US PRESSWIRE



CASH CROP The supply of elite shutdown corners like Asomugha is small—driving up their price.

THE PASS PAYS OFF

Where is the game headed? Follow the money. This off-season the richest contract signed by a running back who moved as a free agent or by trade was the modest four-year, $12.5 million deal that the Bears gave former Viking Chester Taylor. Even potential difference-makers such as Chargers scatback Darren Sproles and Saints do-it-all runner Pierre Thomas failed to reach long-term agreements with their teams and accepted one-year contracts. The last back to strike it truly rich, Shaun Alexander, may have been the caboose on the running back gravy train. After his MVP season in 2005, a 29-year-old Alexander re-signed with the Seahawks for eight years and $62 million—and had all of four 100-yard games the rest of his career.

These days teams are ponying up for players who are pivotal in the passing game, on both sides of the ball. The franchise figures—the average of the top five salaries at each position—from 2001 to 2009 show that wide receiver and cornerback have zoomed up the salary scale, led by players like Cardinals receiver Larry Fitzgerald (who averages about $10 million a year) and Raiders cover corner Nnamdi Asomugha ($14.3 million in '09). —P.K.

POSITION	'01 SALARY (RANK)	'09 SALARY (RANK)	% CHANGE
WIDE RECEIVER	$3.86m (8)	$9.88m (3)	+156%
CORNERBACK	$4.18m (7)	$9.96m (2)	+138%
QUARTERBACK	$6.93m (1)	$14.65m (1)	+111%
SAFETY	$3.22m (9)	$6.34m (8)	+97%
OFFENSIVE LINE	$4.51m (5)	$8.45m (5)	+87%
LINEBACKER	$4.76m (4)	$8.30m (6)	+74%
DEFENSIVE END	$5.39m (2)	$8.99m (4)	+67%
RUNNING BACK	$4.22m (6)	$6.62m (7)	+57%
DEFENSIVE TACKLE	$5.08m (3)	$6.06m (9)	+19%


90



CHICAGO'S LEAP OF FAITH

GETTING TO THE QUARTERBACK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER, WHICH IS WHY THE BEARS TOOK A $91.5 MILLION CHANCE ON DEFENSIVE END JULIUS PEPPERS—HIS CRITICS BE DAMNED

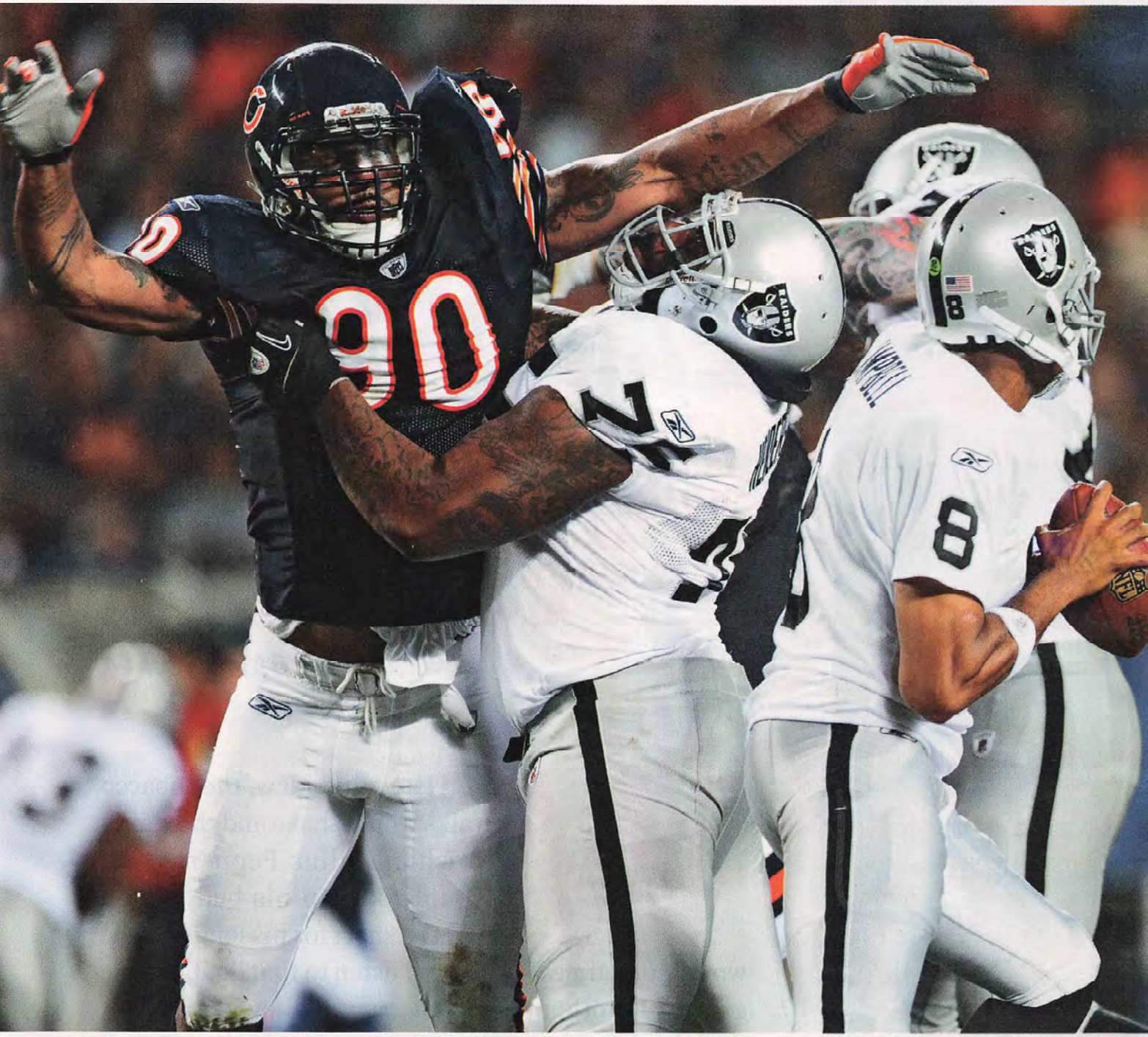
BY DAMON HACK

Photograph by JOHN BIEVER

When the wind blew, the tobacco stalks would shake and the trailer in which Julius Peppers lived would rock. In his bed, which was too short for his long legs, he would sometimes lie still and listen to that double-wide groan. But other times the growing boy would rise, duck his head beneath the low roof and take off with the gusts blowing through Bailey, N.C. "Running to get in shape," he says, "or just running for no reason."

He was impossible to miss: 6' 3" by the time he was in middle school, already broad and thick and muscular. Just about everyone in Bailey (pop. 670), famous for its Country Doctor Museum, knew of Julius's sporting prowess and quiet nature. One youth coach would pick him up at home for a game, and a different coach might drop him off afterward. On certain days the townsfolk would talk about what Julius could do on the basketball court. Other times it was Julius and that football. And sometimes it was Julius running around that oval. All the while Julius's mother, Bessie Brinkley, worked long hours in a ceramics shop.

"I've known Julius since the fifth grade," says Alton Tyre, who coached him in track



and field at Southern Nash High. "I was in Wilmington when Michael Jordan was there. I coached against Clyde Simmons. Julius is the greatest athlete I have ever seen. A guy that big and that strong is not supposed to be that fast."

Julius was one of the few not trumpeting his gifts. Although he was already bigger than almost everyone he met, he was happy to share the spotlight, even when many of the people in the bleachers just wanted to see him dunk. "He was very introspective and reserved," Tyre says. "I taught him African-American history and U.S. history, and he used to answer essay questions with a level of depth you don't see from a lot of kids. At the eastern regional track meet when he was a sophomore, this kid took the lead on him in the triple jump and starts pointing at Julius's chest, as if to say, You're not man enough to do what I did. Julius gets on the track with these beautiful phases and jumps 46' 11½" to beat the kid. Julius got out of that sand and didn't say a word. He didn't even look at the kid. He just walked around the track with his teammates, high-fiving."

Asked about his muted response to his own athletic feats, Peppers says, "I think I was just born like that, a personality trait. I'm an observer."

Peppers's power and perspective helped make him an All-America defensive end at North Carolina (where he also walked on to the basketball team), an All-Pro with the Panthers and, last March, the key free-agent pickup of the off-season. When he signed a six-year, $91.5 million deal with the Bears it underscored the importance of the pass rusher in the era of the quarterback. Chicago already had the face of its franchise in middle linebacker Brian Urlacher, but Peppers gave the team a

JOHN BIEVER

THROUGH HOOPS
Peppers, a five-time Pro Bowl pick, might also be the NFL's best power forward: He was a key reserve for Dean Smith's Tar Heels for two seasons.

big-play threat—a player with strength, speed and quickness honed on the track and the basketball court as well as the football field. "I'm sure every sport he [competed in] played a part in what he's able to do," says Brian Foster, who was Peppers's defensive coordinator at Southern Nash, "but he always had that first step and that freakish ability. I think his burst is from God."

Just as significant, signing with the Bears ended Peppers's 30 years in North Carolina, during which he had been called everything from a boyhood legend to the greatest pass rusher since Lawrence Taylor to an underachiever who didn't bring it on every play. The charge that Peppers's fire didn't always match his physical gifts first surfaced shortly before the Panthers drafted him second overall out of UNC—despite the fact that he used to run sprints with the defensive backs because his fellow linemen were too slow. The talk was heard as recently as last season, when with the Panthers off to an 0–3 start, linebacker Jon Beason told a radio station that he wanted to see more "intensity" from Peppers. The following week Beason said he had been wrong to go public with a team matter, and both players and coaches came to

CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

PEPPERS BENEFITED FROM HIS THREE-SPORT BACKGROUND, BUT, SAYS HIS HIGH SCHOOL COACH, "I THINK HIS BURST IS FROM GOD."

Peppers's defense. "I never saw the kid take a practice off," says Browns quarterback Jake Delhomme, a teammate of Peppers's in Carolina for seven seasons. "I never saw him miss a practice in training camp. I never saw him miss practice during the season. I never saw him gloat. He came to play, he came to work. Julius is a quiet guy, and people might misunderstand him because he keeps to himself."

Delhomme remembers that the negative chatter about Peppers was loudest in 2007, when Peppers had just 2½ sacks. "We were 7–9, and he was just crucified," Delhomme says. "People seem to forget, we weren't winning games, so teams were running the ball late in the game and you're not going to get sacks. And then the next year he has a good year [a career-high 14½ sacks], but we were 12–4 and teams had to throw it. You have to look at the big picture."

Peppers says the criticism used to bother him, but he understands that it's inevitable, given his nature. "You can be an emotional, high-strung guy, and that might work for you," he says. "I think I can be reserved and quiet and play as well as the next guy."



GRANT HALVERSON/AP

Sal Sunseri, the linebackers coach at Alabama, was a Panthers' defensive coach from 2002 to '08. "There was never a guy I coached who was better prepared," Sunseri says. "Sometimes a young man gets frustrated when they're sliding protection over and doing everything they can to block his ass. When you're the top dog, they're doing everything they can to keep you from the quarterback. If you're an offensive coordinator, you better know how you're going to block Julius Peppers."

Even though he had allies among the Panthers, Peppers admits he had been thinking about leaving Carolina for two years. After he turned down a four-year, $54 million offer from the team before the 2009 season, the Panthers placed a franchise tag on him, which meant he made more than $18 million last year. This season, citing financial reasons, the organization decided against using its franchise tag on him (it would have cost more than $20 million), leaving Peppers free to test the market.

Departing meant leaving behind a remarkable legacy of triumph—and controversy. Peppers was named Defensive Rookie of the Year for 2002 after a season in which he had 12 sacks in 12 games, but he missed Carolina's last four games for violating league policy on banned substances. (Peppers, who has said the positive test was the result of a diet supplement containing ephedra that he obtained from a friend, called it "crazy" for people to think he needed steroids to boost his performance.) The following season he helped lead Carolina to the Super Bowl, which the Panthers lost to New England on a late Adam Vinatieri field goal. Carolina hasn't made it that far since.

"It was time for a change, not only from that franchise but from the state," says the 30-year-old Peppers. "I'm from a small town, and I've lived in Charlotte, which is really a small city and a small town too, but I've never lived in a big city or had to perform under the spotlight in one. That's a challenge in itself. I like those things. I wasn't going to shy away."

Peppers has quickly warmed to Chicago, where he plans to start a foundation to help at-risk young men. He also embraced the city's fast pace: Following his introductory press conference in March, Peppers ventured out to the club Crescendo and bought 25 bottles of Perrier Jouet Fleur de Champagne (about $350 per bottle) for the patrons. Captured on YouTube, it's a big-city moment light years from Bailey: As bottles lit by sparklers are passed around the room, the DJ can be heard shouting his

appreciation over the thumping sound system. "Make some noise for the new Chicago Bear, J. Peppers in the building!" the DJ says. "Super Bowl, next year, 2010, Chicago Bears. Thank you, Julius."

The Bears see Peppers as a complete defensive end who can help stop the run and cause general discomfort to opposing offenses, but it's his ability to pressure the quarterback that makes him most valuable. "Our scheme is predicated on the pass rush," says Chicago general manager Jerry Angelo. "We think third down on first down, so a player of Julius's skill set really accentuates what we want to do on defense."

His teammates are already getting a taste of the discomfort Peppers can cause. At a recent practice he lined up at right end. At the snap he engaged the left tackle, freed himself, rushed the quarterback, leaped into the air as the quarterback threw a screen pass into the flat, spun around and chased down the running back, who saw the ball sail over his head. Peppers did it all so quickly that he made it look easy.

"You go up to block him, and you don't expect to get pushed back, because it doesn't look like he's coming off real hard," says Bears tight end Desmond Clark. "Then you lock onto him, and you find yourself backpedaling. As soon as you meet that force and he's pushing you back, it doesn't matter what it looks like. It didn't look hard for Michael Jordan, but he always got it done."

Urlacher shakes his head. "Three hundred damn pounds," he says. "I don't know how a man his size moves as good as he does. This dude busts his ass every day. I don't understand [the criticism]. The expectations for him are so high, people wanting him to get a sack every single play—you can't do it."

Coach Lovie Smith and defensive coordinator Rod Marinelli plan to take advantage of what Smith says are "a couple of outstanding [pass-rushing] moves and a great countermove off them." The more attention an opposing offensive line pays to Peppers, the more it opens up chances for other pass rushers. "Everybody you talked to about Julius said the same thing," says Smith. "A guy like Ron Meeks, his defensive coordinator [with Carolina last season], said, 'This is one of the best guys you will ever be around.' And Julius did his homework on us too. I talked to him about the teachers we had on our staff. Stern teachers. We're not going 'm-f' and cursing guys out on the football field, but each day we're going to coach them hard and try to teach them exactly what we want them to do."

Marinelli, a former defensive line coach to Warren Sapp and Simeon Rice, says of Peppers, "It's his work habits, attention to detail, his presence at meetings, how he takes notes. He's a pro, and he's setting a standard on how to be a pro, and he doesn't even have to say anything."

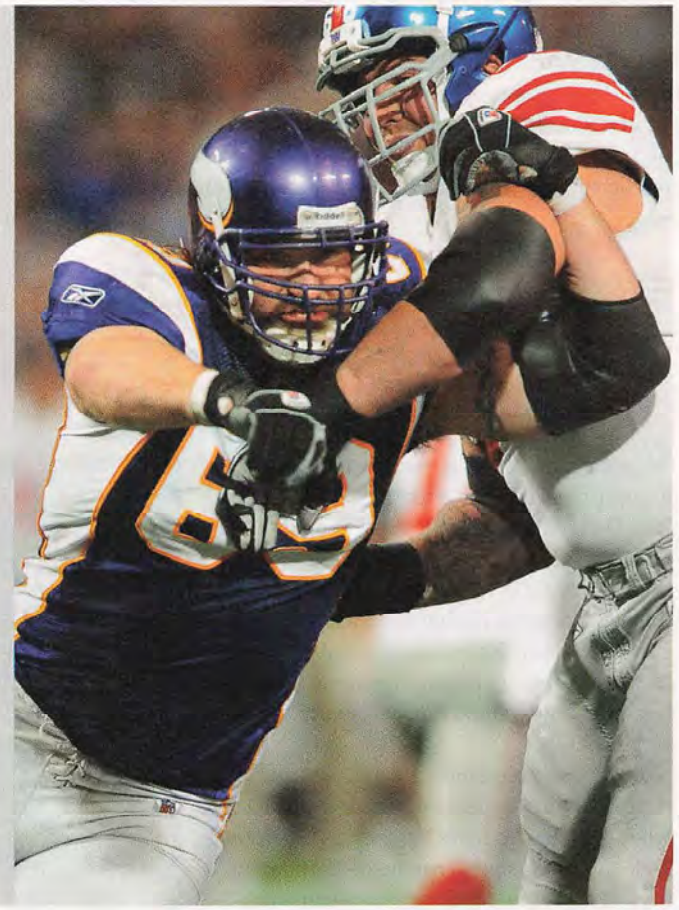
And so Peppers doesn't. The giant man maintains a low profile as usual. But one thing about him has changed. Never a stat hound in his career, Peppers has made it known that he has his eye on Michael Strahan's single-season sack record of 22½. "Realistically, who knows if I ever get there, but if you don't shoot for it, you never will," he says.

He'll have to run like the wind to do it. □

THE SACKMEN COMETH

Here are SI's five most fearsome pass rushers for 2010 and beyond. They'll chase and drop quarterbacks for the next half decade. —*Peter King*

PLAYER, TEAM	HEIGHT	WEIGHT	AGE
1. DeMarcus Ware, *Dallas*	6' 4"	262	28
Tied for seventh in the NFL with 11 sacks last year. Not shabby, but it's nothing compared to what he did in '08: 20 sacks, 20 pressures.			
2. Jared Allen, *Minnesota*	6' 6"	270	28
Tireless worker who is as powerful rushing inside as he is speedy outside. Has had at least 14½ sacks in each of last three seasons.			
3. Mario Williams, *Houston*	6' 6"	285	25
Top overall pick in '05 is still waiting for the breakout season his talent promises, despite averaging nearly 12 sacks over last three years.			
4. Brian Orakpo, *Washington*	6' 4"	260	24
Look for the second-year former Longhorn to have a 15-sack season under new Skins defensive coordinator Jim Haslett.			
5. Julius Peppers, *Chicago*	6' 7"	283	30
Edges Dwight Freeney of the Colts for the final spot. Great match with smart Rod Marinelli, who was promoted to defensive coordinator.			



TOM DAHLIN











no 2 office parties are alike

but all D&B parties are awesome

contact a special events coordinator for current specials



daveandbusters.com/holidayparty


JETS



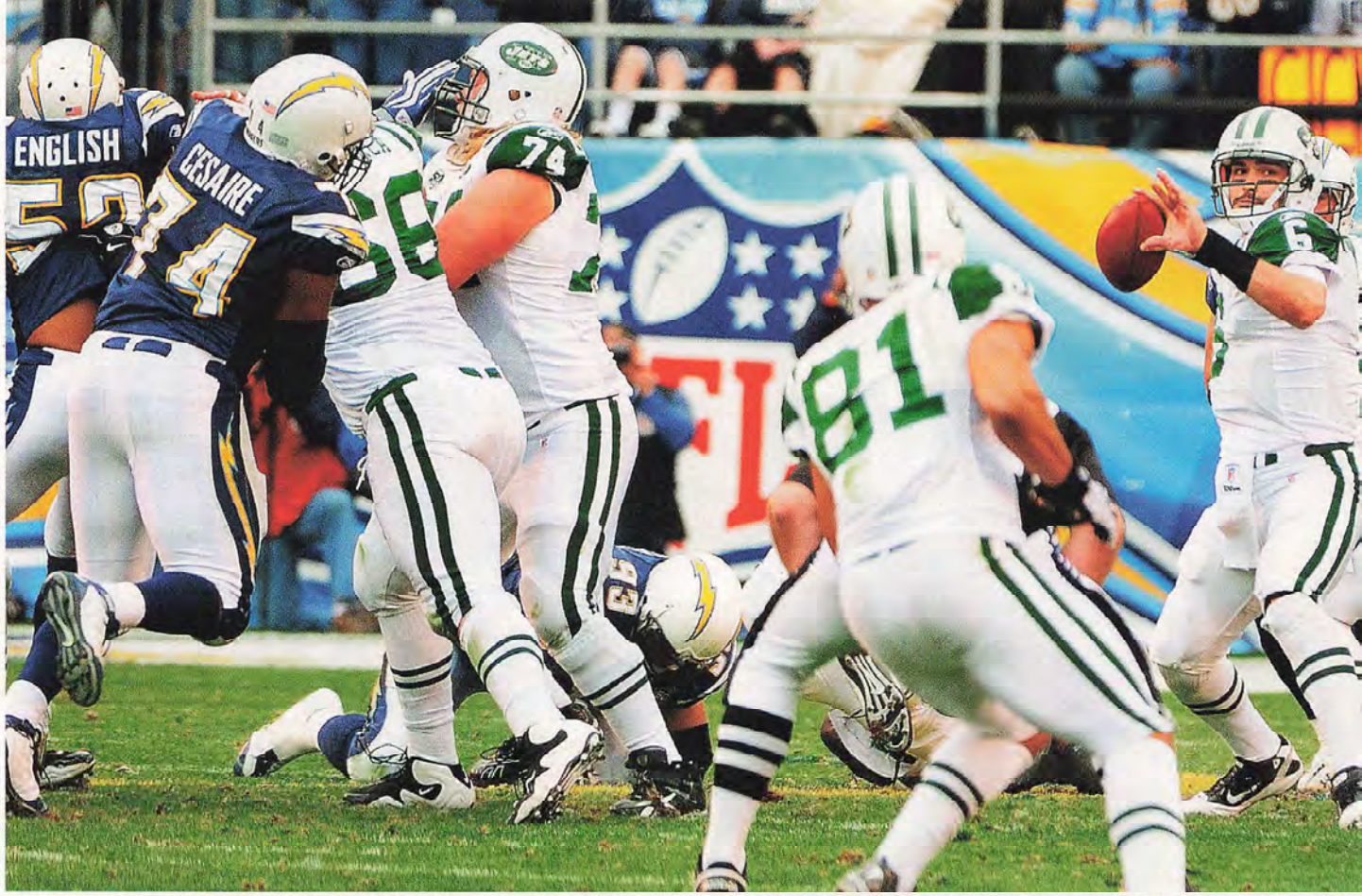
MAKING THE SNAP DECISIONS

HE HAS THE STRONG ARM AND DRAMATIC FLAIR. BUT FOR MARK SANCHEZ TO BE A TRUE STAR, HE MUST DEVELOP THE NFL QB'S SIXTH SENSE

BY PHIL TAYLOR

Photograph by SIMON BRUTY

The Jets are not worried about Mark Sanchez. They are *so* not worried. They even seem to practice being not worried. On the very first pass of their first preseason game, Sanchez, the second-year quarterback whose performance might determine whether the Jets' season ends in Dallas (site of the Super Bowl) or in disappointment, threw an interception that Giants defensive back Antrel Rolle returned for a near



CLOCKWORK FOOTBALL

"I WANT THE RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE THIS WORK," SANCHEZ SAYS. "I'M NOT GOING TO SHY AWAY. SOPHOMORE SLUMP? LET'S GO. I'LL SHOW YOU."

touchdown. It was an imprudent decision—the intended receiver, LaDainian Tomlinson, was sandwiched between a linebacker and a safety—compounded by an inaccurate throw, slightly behind LT.

The play could not have been more ominous, since it was so reminiscent of the mistakes Sanchez made during the down parts of his up-and-down rookie season, when he threw 20 picks and 12 touchdown passes. But if any of his teammates were thinking the obvious, they were careful not to let on. They slapped him on the pads more than if he had thrown for an 80-yard score. "Just an exhibition game," backup quarterback Mark Brunell told him, more than once. Brunell didn't break into song, as he did when Sanchez threw a pick in a training camp scrimmage. "What's that Van Halen song?" Sanchez says. "He started singing it to me. 'I get up, and nothing gets me down . . . You got to ro-o-oll with the punches. . . .' "

The song was *Jump*, by Van Halen, and the Jets would probably sign David Lee Roth to sing it if they thought it would help Sanchez navigate the season's rough patches more smoothly than he did as a rookie. They have tried to give him everything he needs to succeed, from new weapons like Tomlinson at running back and wideout Santonio Holmes to additional mentors like the 39-year-old Brunell.

But worry? The tough-talking, f-bombing Jets don't *do* worry. They will let others wonder about the obvious questions. Did Sanchez's gritty, intelligent performances in the postseason last year, when he helped propel the Jets to the AFC Championship Game, mark the blossoming of a young star? Or is he an erratic young QB who has been overhyped because he has more charisma than any New York quarterback since Joe Namath, dates women most of us only see on TV screens, and rode the coattails of a strong defense and running attack to within a game of the Super Bowl?

Maybe *yes* is the answer to both questions. Sanchez is a quarterback of some contradictions. He seems utterly confident, yet he tends to internalize his mistakes so much that as he sat morosely in front of his locker after a loss to the Bills last year, receiver Braylon Edwards told him, "Pick your head up. I don't want guys to see you like that." He's sophisticated enough to be a presenter at the Tony Awards but lowbrow enough that afterward he would have dined at Taco Bell. His dark good looks make him appear suave in photo shoots, but he's been known to ask his followers on Twitter which Disney movie he should rent for the evening. "*Lion King*? *Aladdin*? *Jungle Book*? *Peter Pan*? Help?!" he once tweeted.

"He can be goofy," says nosetackle Kris Jenkins. "He's one of those California surfer-type dudes."

But Sanchez is deadly serious about his responsibility. What the Jets are asking of him would be a heavy load on any 23-year-old's psyche. They merely want him to run the show for a Super Bowl contender in the league's toughest media market in front of fans

who have been emotionally scarred because their team's most promising seasons always seem to end in heartbreak. No wonder Jets coach Rex Ryan tries to make the task sound less daunting. "We don't need him to be the second coming of Joe Namath," Ryan says. "We just need him to take the next step in his development, to build on the good things he did last season."

It would also help if Sanchez can drastically reduce the bad things he did, like the five interceptions he threw in that loss to Buffalo or the four he tossed when the Jets lost at New England. Games like those are why he ranked near the bottom of the league with a 63.0 quarterback rating (28th) and a 53.8 completion percentage (29th). Sanchez more than atoned in the playoffs, when he played efficiently (only one pick) in victories at Cincinnati and San Diego and made some star-caliber throws, including a perfectly tossed 80-yard touchdown bomb to Edwards in the AFC title-game loss to the Colts.

But he knows his overall performance last year makes him the wild card in the Jets' deck. He seems totally unintimidated by that; no one believes in Sanchez more than Sanchez. "I want the responsibility to make this thing work," he says. "I'm not going to shy away. Sophomore slump? Let's go. I'll show you. We want to get to the Super Bowl, and we need a quarterback who can get us there. I believe I am that quarterback."



There are plenty of signs that Sanchez is that quarterback. He does the things that leaders do, like paying the way for several of his receivers to join him for offseason passing workouts, dubbed Jets West, at his old high school in Mission Viejo, Calif., and putting in long hours of film study. He also has a feel for making just the right gesture. When Sanchez was invited to a state dinner at the White House in May, instead of taking a female companion, he brought his left tackle, D'Brickashaw Ferguson. When Tomlinson visited team headquarters as a free agent, Sanchez had a gift delivered, a piece of crystal with a Jets insignia. "It was a great touch, a way of him saying that they really wanted me here," Tomlinson says. "It told me a lot about the organization and a lot about him."

THE RUSH IS ON
With all the pieces in place for the Jets to be a Super Bowl contender, Ryan (below) hopes Sanchez will pick up where he left off in last season's playoffs.

The issue then is not so much whether Sanchez can be a top-flight NFL quarterback but whether he can become one right now, when the Jets seem to be Super Bowl–caliber in every other area. "Don't see why not," says linebacker Bart Scott. "Don't worry about number 6. He works. He's tough. He's a leader. He'll be fine."

Ryan said during camp that Sanchez made more progress from last year than any other Jet. But in preseason games the QB continued to make poor decisions and inaccurate throws. In addition to his Giants disaster, he tossed an ugly red-zone pick in a loss to the Redskins. And last week Sanchez, who had off-season surgery on his left knee, said that he will wear a brace all season, though he finds it uncomfortable.

Those issues aside, Sanchez believes he has been groomed for this—not necessarily to lead a team to a Super Bowl but to take charge of something, to steer someone to success. The lessons in leadership started early for Mark and his two older brothers, Brandon and Nick Jr. When their father, Nick Sr., dropped them off at school, his last words before they shut the car door were often, "Be a leader today."

ROBERT BECK (TOP); AL PEREIRA/NEW YORK JETS (RIGHT)

"He and my mom wanted us to realize that it was O.K. to step forward or stand out," Sanchez says. "They were huge on us being first in line on field trips, encouraging us to be the ones to ask questions in class or be the first one to go up to the front of the room to give our book report. Now when I have to be the center of attention, I'm comfortable. I've been doing it all my life."

Nick Sr., an Orange County fire captain, often brought his boys to the station, where they developed an appreciation for the importance of keeping calm under pressure. He also gave them some unusual duties, like having them recite multiplication tables or spelling words while dribbling a basketball. "I wanted them to train their minds to handle more than one thing at once," says Nick Sr. "Part of the plan was to put them in somewhat stressful situations where they had to perform both mentally and physically at the same time." Not quite as stressful as staying calm enough to find your third receiver while a 280-pound lineman closes in, but good multitasking preparation nonetheless.

It's probably for the best that as a California kid Sanchez might not fully appreciate the force of history he is going against: Things just have a way of not working out for the Jets. It's as if they used generations' worth of good karma with Namath's famous Super Bowl III upset. They haven't been back since, of course, and some of their most devastating seasons have come when expectations have been highest. Their circumstances this year, for instance, are eerily similar to those of 1999, the last time they had serious preseason Super Bowl buzz around them.

The Jets had reached the AFC Championship Game the previous season, just as they did last year. They had held a halftime lead in the game (3–0 over Denver), just as they did last year, when they led the Colts 17–13. The Broncos shut them out for most of the second half, just as Indianapolis did last year, and sent New York home. The following season, just like this one, all the pieces seemed to be in place for the Jets to take the final step. But in the second quarter of the first game of '99, quarterback Vinny Testaverde tore his Achilles tendon, and all the optimism disappeared. The Jets finished 8–8.

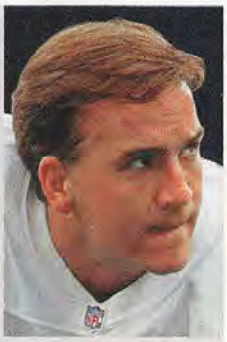
But there are ways to combat the feeling that the franchise is forever doomed. Ryan has started to sweep it out with a cocky attitude that has spread among the players. The less noticeable part of the equation involves hard, unglamorous work, which Sanchez has been more than willing to undertake. During the off-season he had several film sessions with ex–NFL quarterback Rich Gannon, who was known for his thorough preparation. "We would watch tape for hours, until eight, nine o'clock at night," Gannon says. "Before we'd head home, I'd ask him what time he wanted to meet the next day, and he'd say, 'How about 6 a.m.?' Good sign."

It was all part of Sanchez's effort to improve at the mental part of the game. A year ago he knew enough to operate the offense, but he never mastered it. He leaned on the Jets' offensive line to handle protection schemes and other nuances. He's sure that with a better grasp of what his linemen are doing, he can cut down on the 26 sacks he suffered last year. "Did I know exactly what was going on with every single play?" Sanchez says. "I'd be lying if I said I did. That's when you have to act a little bit. You have to look guys in the eye and project total confidence even if you don't completely feel it."

Acting should come easily to a Southern California kid who has a touch of Broadway flair. But, the Jets hope, this is the season when Sanchez can truly act natural. What will that mean for them? "We should be really good," Sanchez says, "if we can get our QB in order." He was smiling when he said it. He didn't look worried. Not at all. □

AL TIELEMANS

ENCORE!



The Jets went 8–7 in games Mark Sanchez—the No. 5 pick in last year's draft—started during the 2009 regular season and reached the AFC Championship Game. Sanchez was the seventh first-round pick since 1970 to make all or all but one of his team's starts at QB as a rookie. Here's how the first six fared in their second seasons.

PLAYER, TEAM	YEAR	STARTS	COMP%	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	W–L
Jim Plunkett	1971	14	48.2	2,158	19	16	68.6	6–8
Patriots	1972	14	47.6	2,196	8	25	45.7	3–11
The future Raiders' Super Bowl hero slumped as a sophomore; he endured a streak of six games in which he failed to throw a touchdown and tossed at least two picks.								
Rick Mirer	1993	16	56.4	2,833	12	17	67.0	6–10
Seahawks	1994	13	51.2	2,151	11	7	70.2	5–8
A year after setting rookie records for yards, attempts and completions, his season ended in Week 13 with a broken thumb. He played spottily in six more seasons.								
Peyton Manning	1998	16	56.7	3,739	26	28	71.2	3–13
Colts	1999	16	62.1	4,135	26	15	90.7	13–3
The gold standard for young QBs, Manning *(above)* slashed his interception total nearly in half from his rookie year and made the first of his 10 Pro Bowl trips.								
David Carr	2002	16	52.5	2,592	9	15	62.8	4–12
Texans	2003	11	56.6	2,013	9	13	69.5	3–8
Battered by a record 76 sacks in '02, Carr went down only 15 times as a soph but missed several games with a shoulder injury. Houston gave up on him three years later.								
Matt Ryan	2008	16	61.1	3,440	16	11	87.7	11–5
Falcons	2009	14	58.3	2,916	22	14	80.9	9–5
The No. 3 pick in '08 led Atlanta to a seven-game improvement and a playoff berth as a rookie, but his numbers fell—and the Falcons missed the postseason—in '09.								
Joe Flacco	2008	16	60.0	2,971	14	12	80.3	11–5
Ravens	2009	16	63.1	3,613	21	12	88.9	9–7
After reaching the AFC title game as a rookie, Flacco improved his numbers and returned to the postseason, leading the Ravens to a wild-card upset of the Patriots.								

SHOULDER PADS
worn by Y.A. Tittle



The Best of Pro Football

PHOTOS AND STORIES FROM THE WORLD'S GREATEST SPORTS MAGAZINE

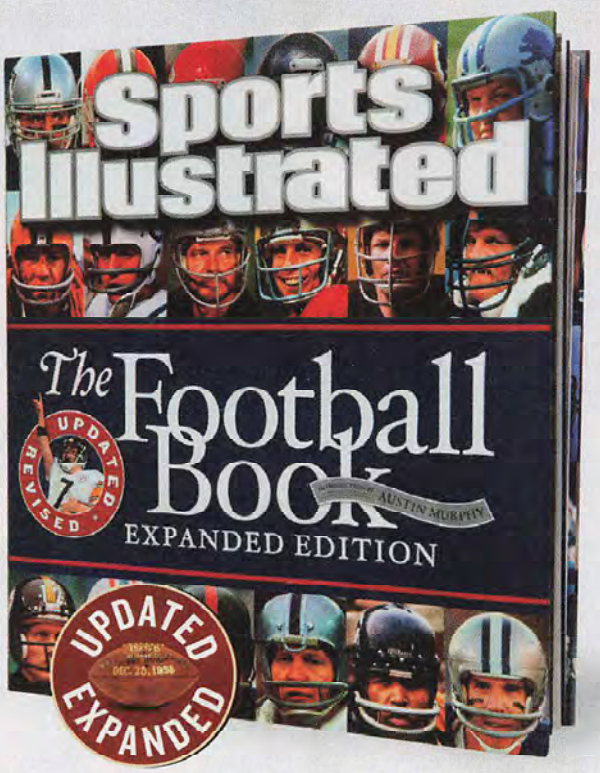
CLASSICS BY PETER KING • GEORGE PLIMPTON • FRANK DEFORD • S.L. PRICE • MYRON COPE
GARY SMITH • ROY BLOUNT JR. • JOHN UNDERWOOD • TEX MAULE • RICK TELANDER . . . AND MANY MORE



Introduction by
Austin Murphy



Incredible Images
Staggering Stats





Magical Moments
Decade-by-Decade All-Pro Teams



A Virtual
Pro Football Museum

An Extravagant 320-page Collection of Unforgettable Stories and Pictures from SI

ORDER NOW at www.SI.com/expandedfootballbook

©2009 Time Inc. All rights reserved. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED is a registered trademark of Time Inc.

Now on SI.com

BLITZ PACKAGE Stay on top throughout the season with SI's wall-to-wall coverage, including Peter King's Monday Morning Quarterback, Don Banks's Snap Judgments, and up-to-the-minute fantasy football news and analysis at **SI.com/NFL**



SCOUTING REPORTS

PETER KING'S PREDICTIONS

SI SENIOR WRITER PETER KING FORECASTS THE 2010 SEASON

AFC EAST		AFC NORTH		AFC SOUTH		AFC WEST	
Jets	10–6	Steelers	11–5	Colts	12–4	Chargers	9–7
Patriots*	10–6	Ravens*	9–7	Texans	9–7	Raiders	7–9
Dolphins	9–7	Bengals	9–7	Titans	7–9	Broncos	7–9
Bills	2–14	Browns	5–11	Jaguars	6–10	Chiefs	6–10

NFC EAST		NFC NORTH		NFC SOUTH		NFC WEST	
Giants	11–5	Packers	11–5	Saints	12–4	49ers	8–8
Cowboys*	10–6	Vikings	10–6	Panthers*	10–6	Seahawks	8–8
Eagles	10–6	Bears	7–9	Falcons	9–7	Cardinals	7–9
Redskins	6–10	Lions	4–12	Bucs	2–14	Rams	3–13

**Wild-card team*

PLAYOFFS

(NUMBER IN PARENTHESES IS PLAYOFF SEED; HOME TEAM IN CAPS)

AFC		NFC
	WILD-CARD ROUND	
(3) JETS 20, (6) Ravens 16		(5) Cowboys 31, (4) 49ERS 17
(5) Patriots 23, (4) CHARGERS 20		(6) Panthers 21, (3) GIANTS 20
AFC	DIVISIONAL ROUND	NFC
(1) COLTS 30, Patriots 25		(1) SAINTS 30, Panthers 24
(2) STEELERS 16, Jets 13		(2) PACKERS 33, Cowboys 27
AFC	CHAMPIONSHIP GAME	NFC
Steelers 27, COLTS 23		Packers 27, SAINTS 24 (OT)

TOPSY-TURVY
Linebacker Michael Boley and the Giants, who missed the NFC playoffs last year, and tight end Todd Heap's Ravens, who lost in the AFC divisional round, are in line for postseason berths.

Photograph by
SIMON BRUTY
Scouting report schedule analysis by
ANDREW PERLOFF
Projected starters by
DAVID SABINO

SUPER BOWL XLV

Feb. 6, 2011 | *Cowboys Stadium, Arlington, Texas*

TURN THE PAGE FOR PETER KING'S PICK

STEELERS 33, PACKERS 27

My philosophy? Past performance is no guarantee of future results, August is packed with false positives, and there's no morals clause for the postseason. Expect the unexpected—and look for a Black and Gold party, Big Ben included, in Dallas in February. It just feels right

BY PETER KING *Photograph by* JOHN BIEVER

THE STEELERS? Really? The team with the suspended starting quarterback? The one that traded away a Super Bowl MVP? The club that couldn't beat the Chiefs or the Raiders in 2009? The defensively mortal Steelers? The geezer Steelers? Green Bay in the NFC you can understand, especially after Aaron Rodgers's phenomenal preseason. But Pittsburgh? The football gods are laughing, and the karma gods are weeping.

This should be a year in which the Steelers get their comeuppance for treating alleged sexual assault more lightly than a violation of the league's substance abuse policy: Pittsburgh retained star quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, whom two women accused of forcing himself on them, while whacking star receiver Santonio Holmes, ignominiously traded to the Jets for a fifth-round pick after his second substance-policy violation.

But Super Bowl predictions, at least mine, have nothing to do with morality or justice. They have little to do with the previous year's form, either. The Super Bowl favorite on Labor Day is usually nowhere to be found come February. Note the last three NFL champions:

• The Giants, in the 2007 season. They were coming off an 8–8 2006 campaign in which they had lost six of their last eight and very nearly got their coach fired. As a 10–6 wild card in '07, New York beat the Bucs, the Cowboys and the Packers on the road in the playoffs and knocked off the 18–0 Patriots in Super Bowl XLII.

• The Steelers, 2008. They'd gone 10–6 the year before but lost twice at home to Jacksonville in the last four weeks, including a playoff stinker. In '08, behind a stifling defense, Pittsburgh went 12–4 and beat Arizona in a thriller in Super Bowl XLIII.

• The Saints, 2009. They'd finished the previous season 8–8, with the league's 23rd-rated defense, but last year rode Drew Brees's arm to the franchise's first championship, beating the favored Colts in Super Bowl XLIV.

Maybe you saw one of those coming. I doubt it. That's because it's impossible to forecast factors such as injuries, emerging players and the true ease or difficulty of a schedule. Regarding injury, I'd argue that the Steelers' two most valuable defensive players are strong safety Troy Polamalu, the definition of a roaming playmaker, and defensive end Aaron Smith, the most underrated player of his generation. (Ends in the 3–4 system who don't pile up sacks—Smith has just 44 in 11 seasons—get no credit, though defensive

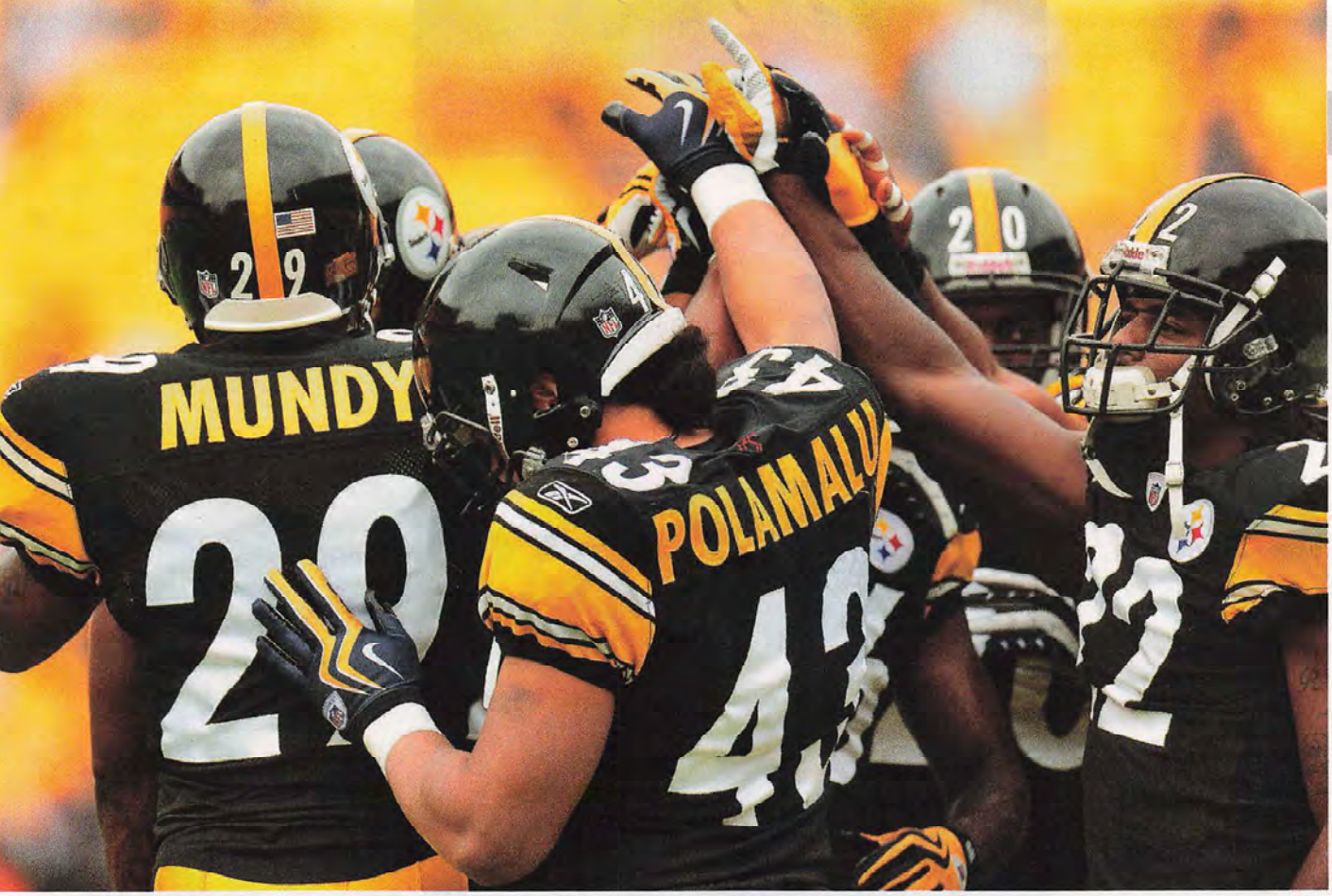


DAMIAN STROHMEYER (WELKER)

AWARDS

Peter King forecasts the 2010 winners

Most Valuable Player
Aaron Rodgers, Quarterback, *Packers*
Offensive Player of the Year
Chris Johnson, Running back, *Titans*
Defensive Player of the Year
Justin Tuck, Defensive end, *Giants*
Offensive Rookie of the Year (tie)
Ryan Mathews, Running back, *Chargers*
Dexter McCluster, Running back, *Chiefs*
Defensive Rookie of the Year
Ndamukong Suh, Defensive tackle, *Lions*
Coach of the Year
John Fox, *Panthers*
Comeback Player of the Year
Wes Welker *(left)*, Wide receiver, *Patriots*



coordinator Dick LeBeau will tell you that Smith's prowess against the run makes the Pittsburgh defense work.) Polamalu and Smith each were limited by injury to five games last year. There's no certainty, of course, that those two will last 16 games in 2010, but if they do, the Pittsburgh defense will be as stout as ever.

On offense the Steelers' MVP might be Roger Goodell. At press time it appeared likely the commissioner would reduce Roethlisberger's suspension from six games to four for good behavior—Roethlisberger spent the summer kissing babies and signing every autograph within miles at training camp. Byron Leftwich and/or Dennis Dixon should be able to navigate a friendly first-month schedule (Atlanta, at Tennessee, at Tampa Bay, Baltimore) and hand Roethlisberger a 3–1 team when he returns. A six-game suspension? That would be trouble, obviously.

BACK IN BLACK
A healthy Polamalu will have the Steelers' defense humming again—just one reason to sense something special in Pittsburgh in 2010.

But I was impressed by what I saw of the Steelers on my training-camp visit to Latrobe, Pa. One play in particular. James Harrison, the 32-year-old linebacker, positioned himself as the gunner in punt coverage. Rookie Antonio Brown from Central Michigan lined up for the return. Harrison, the NFL's defensive player of the year in 2008, is not paid to rocket past kids desperate to make the roster in the dog days of camp. But that's exactly what he did. Harrison bolted downfield and veered in, unblocked, toward Brown. Flustered, the kid juggled and then fumbled the punt. Tomlin howled with delight. "Kid got so nervous his arms wouldn't work!" the coach yelled. Later, talking about the veteran linebacker, Tomlin said, "Now that's a football player. At bed check here in camp, he'll be recopying his notes from the meetings during the day. He wants to get it perfect."

I LIKED WHAT I SAW IN LATROBE. WHEN 32-YEAR-OLD ALL-PROS ARE RUNNING 90 MILES AN HOUR ON PUNT COVERAGE IN AUGUST, IT'S A GOOD SIGN.

I like three young players to emerge in Pittsburgh: versatile second-year defensive end Ziggy Hood, who was a terror in training camp; second-year man Mike Wallace, who'll replace Holmes as the big-play wideout opposite Hines Ward (wait until you see him cut and turn upfield); and rookie center Maurkice Pouncey, whose speed and power should bolster a weak interior line.

One thing about picking Pittsburgh does concern me. Last year, when coach Mike Tomlin implored his players to reach inside themselves and pull out that championship something, the Steelers lost to Kansas City. Then to Baltimore. Then to Oakland and Cleveland. I worry about a coach who can't draw that sense of urgency out of his men.

If Super Bowl picks were scientific, we'd take the defending champions every year and be right 15% of the time. (In the last 20 seasons there have been three repeat champions.) Super Bowl picks have to be made on feel. When 32-year-old former All-Pros are running 90 miles an hour on punt coverage in August, it's a good sign. In a league with so many unknowns in Week 1, Harrison's scaring the tar out of some poor kid from Central Michigan is the kind of metaphor I like. February 6 in Arlington, Texas: Pittsburgh 33, Green Bay 27. □

1 New York JETS

A big, bad and ever-improving tackle should clear a path to the postseason

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 9–7

September
13 Baltimore (M)
19 New England
26 at Miami

October
3 at Buffalo
11 Minnesota (M)
17 at Denver
24 BYE
31 Green Bay

November
7 at Detroit
14 at Cleveland
21 Houston
25 Cincinnati (T)

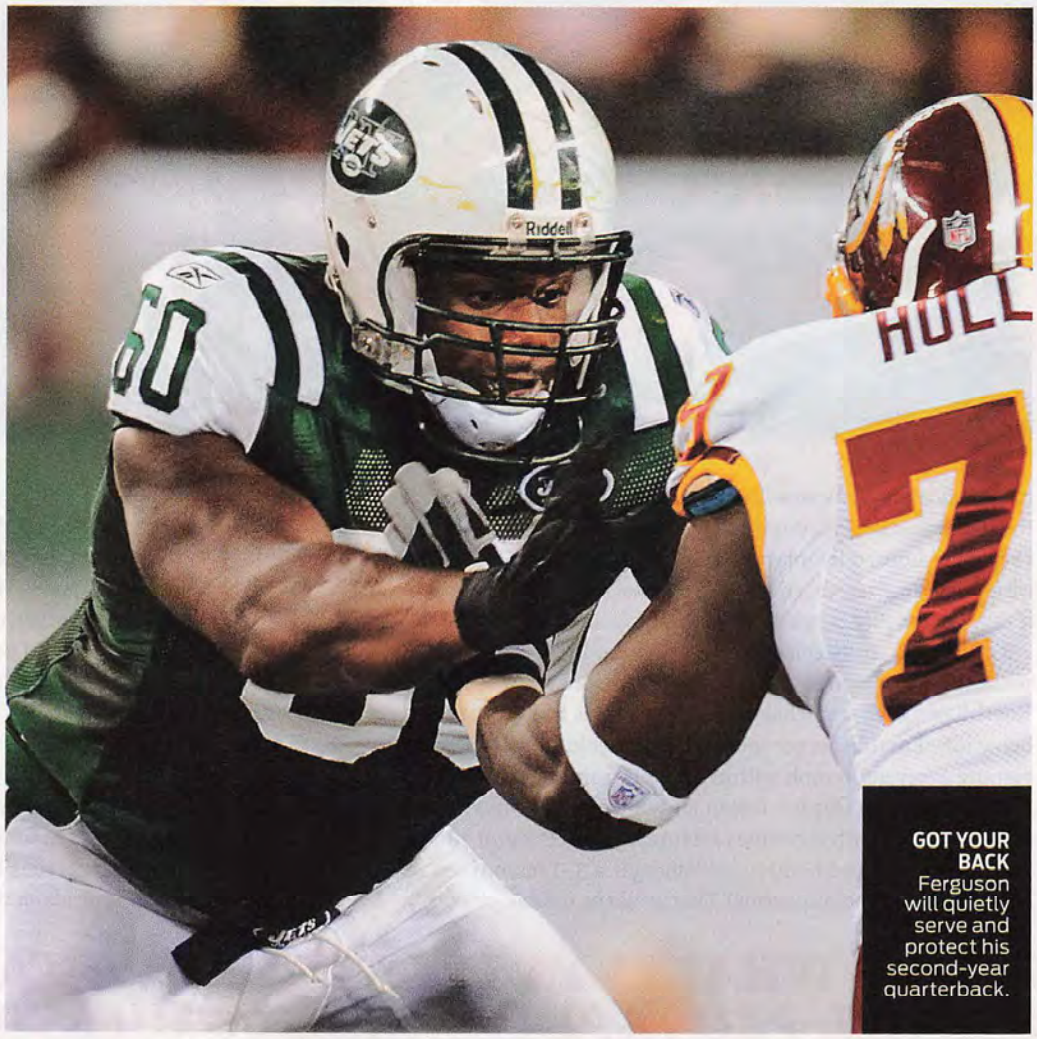
December
6 at New England (M)
12 Miami
19 at Pittsburgh
26 at Chicago

January
2 Buffalo

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T16**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.500**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **6**

ANALYSIS
The Jets were streaky last season as an upstart; as the division favorite they're set up for an emotional roller coaster ride this year, beginning with three divisional matchups in their first four games. Starting in Week 10, revenge will be on the minds of Braylon Edwards, Jason Taylor and Santonio Holmes: During a six-game stretch each has a showdown with his former team.



GOT YOUR BACK Ferguson will quietly serve and protect his second-year quarterback.

HBO'S *Hard Knocks* television cameras turned the Jets' Cortland, N.Y., training camp into a working set this August, but Rex Ryan's team, in some ways, already resembled the titular group from one of that channel's staples, the 2001 movie *Ocean's Eleven*. The Jets are a brash and entertaining mishmash of highly skilled specialists brought together in the hope that they will collectively achieve that greatest of NFL heists: making off with the Super Bowl trophy, which the franchise hasn't won in 42 years.

Call them Ryan's Fifty-three.

This, perhaps, is where the comparison begins to break down, as it would require Ryan to assume George Clooney's role. "Rex is, uh, a little rougher around the edges," says quarterback Mark Sanchez. Still, left tackle D'Brickashaw Ferguson plays along. "I'd probably just be the black guy—Don Cheadle, you know?" he says. "I'm not Brad Pitt."

Ferguson, who has started every game since New York drafted him No. 4 overall out of Virginia in 2006, appreciates the audacity of his coach and his teammates. "It's enjoyable to see the hams on the team, like your [linebacker] Bart Scotts, your [nosetackle] Kris Jenkinses," he says. "We're the type of team that's like, 'Hey,

HEINZ KLUETMEIER

this is what we're going to do. If you don't like it, screw you.' "

Ferguson is content to cede the limelight to other incumbents and the Jets' starry newcomers. During the off-season they traded for cornerback Antonio Cromartie and wide receiver Santonio Holmes, who was seventh in the league in receiving yards, and signed free-agent running back LaDainian Tomlinson, a two-time rushing champ, and defensive end Jason Taylor, the NFL's active leader in sacks, with 127½. "I think because we have so many guys who are outspoken, that void has kind of been filled, and I can lead in other ways," Ferguson says.

The addition of four players with a combined 12 career Pro Bowl selections will help, but for the Jets to win the Super Bowl that they have so often predicted for themselves, they must receive a significantly improved performance from their second-year QB. Sanchez is quick to confirm all of the things he must upgrade. A 63.0 quarterback rating? "Yes." A 12-to-20 TD-to-interception ratio? "Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Check 'em all." And Sanchez's ability to improve will hinge on Ferguson, who quietly protects his blind side. Says Jenkins, "He just comes in, straps it up and does his job."

The 6' 6", 310-pound Ferguson participated in the Pro Bowl for the first time in 2009, even though he allowed eight sacks, twice as many as the season before. But that number was belied by two factors. First, he was protecting a jittery rookie rather than Brett Favre. "I'm sitting back there patting the ball, taking way too much time," admits Sanchez. Second, Ryan and offensive line coach Bill Callahan rarely gave Ferguson help, allowing them to deploy blockers elsewhere. "You look at that game against Indianapolis"—a 30–17 AFC Championship Game loss—"and he's going against Dwight Freeney, who's an unbelievable player," Ryan says. "And [Ferguson] is the only guy in the league, I guarantee you, who doesn't have help on him." Freeney didn't record a QB hit, let alone a sack, and Sanchez had one of his best games as a pro, throwing for 257 yards and two touchdowns. "Brick's sick," says Sanchez. "He's like Revis, but an O-lineman."

That Ferguson would ever be compared with a player of cornerback Darrelle Revis's caliber seemed doubtful after Ferguson's first two seasons, in which he allowed 23 sacks. "He was smaller, lighter, not as strong—very athletic, but he wasn't there yet," says Taylor, who as a Dolphin used to regularly exploit Ferguson. "Now I think he's one of the better left tackles in the league."

Even though Revis's contract holdout (at press time the runner-up in last year's NFL Defensive Player of the Year voting had yet to report to camp) might force Ryan to start the season shorthanded, his Ferguson-anchored offense should now approach the caliber of his fierce defense, which was the NFL's best in 2009. The most precious of spoils—the seven pounds of sterling silver known as the Lombardi Trophy—is there for the Jets' taking. —*Ben Reiter*

DAVID BERGMAN

SPOTLIGHT

Nick Folk, Kicker

REX RYAN'S August bluster extended all the way down his roster to his new placekicker. "I want to go on record to say I'm officially not worried about our Pro Bowl kicker anymore," Ryan said. "He really does look good." Heady words about a player who missed 10 field goals as a Cowboy in 2009—the second-highest total in the NFL, even though Dallas cut him with two weeks left in the season. Folk, an earring-wearing, crew-cutted 25-year-old, made the Pro Bowl as a rookie, in '07, and succeeded on 20 of his 22 field goal attempts in '08. His troubles last season stemmed not from the yips but from his hip. The rightfooted Folk had surgery to repair a right labral tear in May '09 (two months after the same doctor performed a similar procedure on Yankees slugger Alex Rodriguez) and couldn't start kicking until July, three months later than he normally begins preparing for a season. He never felt quite right. "My swing was really punchy last year," he says. "I had no flexibility in my hip."

Folk now says he is ready to deal with the notoriously swirling winds at the Meadowlands (and not just the ones emanating from his coach). But considering New York's improving offense, he's resigned to the possibility that he might not get too many field goal tries. "If I just have to kick extra points and kick off to win a Super Bowl," he says, "I'm game for that."



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **REX RYAN**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 20

QB	**MARK SANCHEZ**				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	15	364	196	53.8	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	2,444	12	20	63.0	
RB	**SHONN GREENE**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	14	108	540	5.0	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	0	0	–	2	
FB	**TONY RICHARDSON**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	7	48	6.9	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	3	10	3.3	0	
WR	**JERRICHO COTCHERY**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	14	57	821	4	
WR	**BRAYLON EDWARDS**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	45	680	4	
TE	**DUSTIN KELLER**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	45	522	2	
LT	**D'BRICKASHAW FERGUSON**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 6"	310		
LG	***VLADIMIR DUCASSE (R)***				
	G	HT	WT		
	11	6' 5"	325		
C	**NICK MANGOLD**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 4"	307		
RG	**BRANDON MOORE**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 3"	305		
RT	**DAMIEN WOODY**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 3"	327		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 1

DE	**SHAUN ELLIS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	53	6½	0
NT	**KRIS JENKINS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	6	13	0	0
DE	**MIKE DEVITO**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	28	0	0
LB	**BRYAN THOMAS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	53	2	0
LB	**BART SCOTT**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	92	1	0
LB	**DAVID HARRIS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	127	5½	2
LB	**CALVIN PACE**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	12	55	8	0
CB	***KYLE WILSON (R)***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	43	1	3
FS	***BRODNEY POOL***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	11	50	1	4
SS	**JIM LEONHARD**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	76	2½	1
CB	***ANTONIO CROMARTIE***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	33	0	3

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**STEVE WEATHERFORD**		
	PUNTS	AVG	NET
	80	42.0	36.7
K	***NICK FOLK***		
	FG	XP	POINTS
	18–28	36–36	90
PR	**JERRICHO COTCHERY**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	23	10.3	0
KR	**BRAD SMITH**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	10	31.0	1

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 New England PATRIOTS

New England has been remade, but can it reclaim its supremacy over the NFL?

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 10–6

September
12 Cincinnati
19 at N.Y. Jets
26 Buffalo

October
4 at Miami (M)
10 BYE
17 Baltimore
24 at San Diego
31 Minnesota

November
7 at Cleveland
14 at Pittsburgh
21 Indianapolis
25 at Detroit (T)

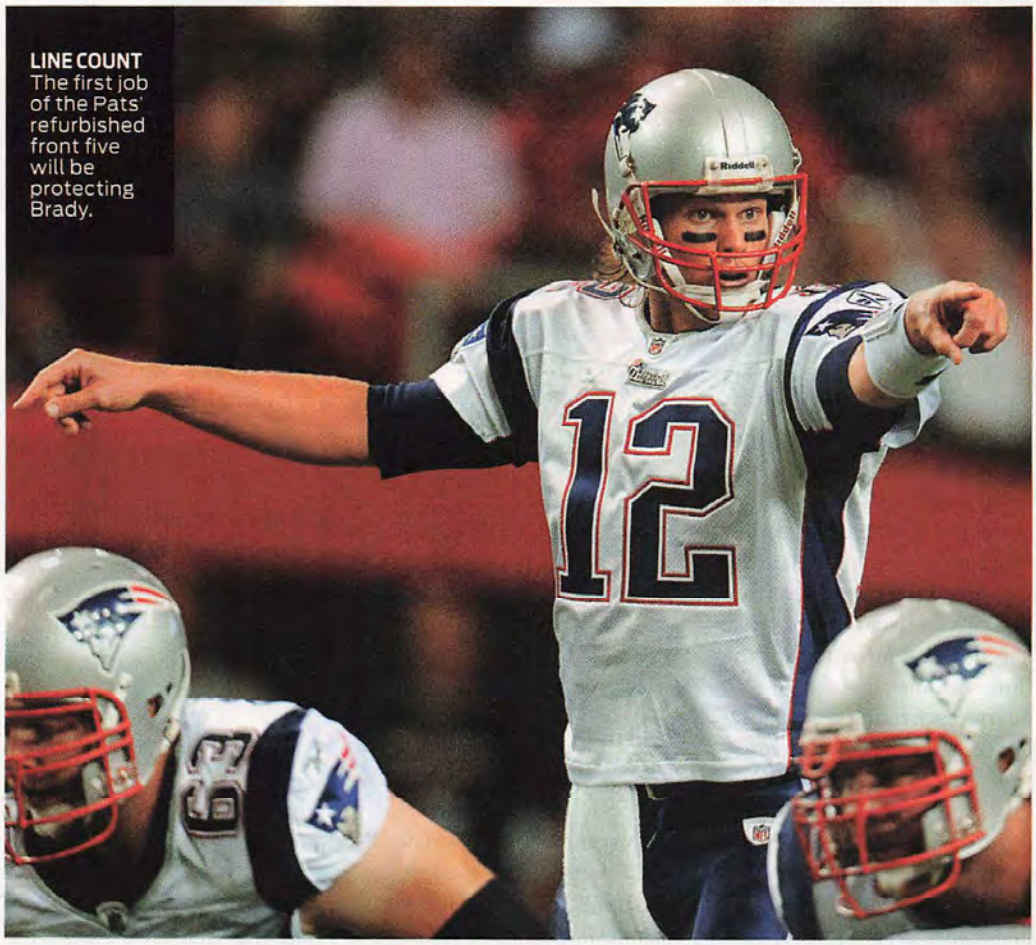
December
6 N.Y. Jets (M)
12 at Chicago
19 Green Bay
26 at Buffalo

January
2 Miami

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **6**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.531**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
The tone will be set early, with showdowns against the AFC North–champion Bengals and AFC East–rival Jets, and the traditional game with Indy looms too, the eighth straight time the two AFC powers have played in the regular season. The Pats will need to pack their parkas come November—save for a visit to Detroit's dome, it's cold weather sites from then on.



LINE COUNT The first job of the Pats' refurbished front five will be protecting Brady.

BOB ROSATO

BILL BELICHICK does not like to explain himself. So when he was asked last month why the photographs that had covered the hallways of Gillette Stadium—hundreds of them, from each of the Patriots' 121 victories since 2001, including their three Super Bowl triumphs—had been taken down, he gruffly replied, "Walls needed painting." But nobody in the New England organization needs to hear the coach's reasoning to understand his message: 2010 is the beginning of a new era for the decorated franchise. "If you haven't figured it out, you're not supposed to be here," says 34-year-old running back Kevin Faulk, the only member of the team whose arrival in Foxborough predates Belichick's. (Faulk was a second-round pick out of LSU in 1999; Belichick was hired in 2000.) "Everything is connected around here." Faulk pauses. "Trust me."

As Belichick enters his second decade as the Patriots' coach, just nine players remain on the roster from his 2004 Super Bowl champions and just 18 from his '07 team that went 19–1. Of the 82 players on New England's training camp roster in the first week of August, 52 had come to the organization since the end of the '08 season—including the 24 draft picks Belichick has made over the past two years, three more than any other team. Never mind the glory days. The majority of these Patriots never even played with Matt Cassel.

Outside linebacker Tully Banta-Cain spent the first four years of his career in New England before signing as a free agent with the 49ers in 2007. He

returned to Foxborough a year ago to find a locker room full of strangers. "When I left, there was a lot of cohesion between the guys," says Banta-Cain, 29, a late-blooming pass rusher whose career-high 10 sacks led the Patriots in '09. "Now there are obviously a lot of different last names. It's hard not to notice when you're used to certain guys being in the locker room—[Tedy] Bruschi, [Mike] Vrabel, [Rodney] Harrison. Those guys being gone, I think it's a great opportunity for the young guys to make a name for themselves."

This, clearly, is Belichick's hope: that vital contributors will quickly emerge out of his youth movement and seamlessly integrate with the stalwarts he has retained. That seems most likely to happen on offense. Sebastian Vollmer, the 6' 8", 315-pound second-year German tackle, a former swimmer who took up football at 14 and played in college at Houston, has matured into a mauling blocker and is poised to emerge as the anchor of an aging but still effective line that yielded only 18 sacks in '09. The Tom Brady–led passing game, which last season seemed overly reliant on Wes Welker and Randy Moss (the duo was responsible for 53% of the team's receptions), should now be more multifaceted, due in no small part to the development of second-year receiver Julian Edelman. The former Kent State quarterback looked good late last season while subbing for Welker after the latter blew out his knee early in a Week 17 loss to the Texans. "We've got weapons all over the field on the offense," says Banta-Cain. "Tom will definitely have his targets, and we have to hit them. It's a committee this year."

Less certain will be the performance of Belichick's overhauled defense. The secondary, led by Pro Bowl strong safety Brandon Meriweather and featuring three first- or second-round picks from the past two drafts in cornerbacks Darius Butler and Devin McCourty and strong safety Pat Chung, is both talented and deep. But the front seven—which gave up 234 rushing yards to the Ravens in a mortifying 33–14 wild-card loss—remains thin, a problem that got even worse after defensive end Ty Warren, the franchise's active sacks leader, landed on injured reserve last month with a torn labrum in his hip.

New England isn't a preseason favorite to win the AFC East. What, Edelman was asked, was his view on that? Is it just another sign of the overhaul?

The 24-year-old wideout's eyes widened. It was not, he knew, the type of question Belichick favors. Then Edelman smiled, and, showing how well he has learned from his coach, said confidently, "We're just trying to work out there and, you know, get better." A classically inscrutable Belichickian response. If all the kids catch on this quickly, perhaps the new Patriots will come to resemble the Patriots of old sooner than expected. —B.R.

SPOTLIGHT

Aaron Hernandez, Tight end

TIGHT ENDS do not typically flourish with the Patriots. Of the 16 who have played for Bill Belichick during his 10 seasons in New England, none ever had a better receiving season than Ben Watson in 2006. That year Watson had 634 receiving yards on 49 catches—modest numbers that rank 66th and tied for 86th, respectively, on the decade's list of single-season performances by a tight end.

But Belichick longs to find a tight end who can play a more integral role in his passing game. In April he drafted two who have that talent: Arizona's Rob Gronkowski, with the 10th pick of the second round, and Florida's Aaron Hernandez, with the 15th pick of the fourth. While the immense (6' 6", 265 pounds) Gronkowski is the more developed all-around player, it is the 6' 2", 245 pound Hernandez who even at the callow age of 20 could quickly become the pass-catching threat that Tom Brady has never had at the position. Hernandez won the John Mackey Award as college football's best tight end last season, when he had 68 receptions for 850 yards and five touchdowns as Tim Tebow's top target. He fell to the fourth round only because he tested positive for marijuana—Hernandez says only once, though NFL sources say he tested positive several times.

Hernandez gives New England a receiver who can take some of the load off slot man Wes Welker. "He's got a lot of skill out there—a lot of quickness for his size, and he gets open against man-to-man coverage," says Welker. "Blocking's going to be a key thing for him. We can't have a tight end who can't block out on the field. But he's been really impressive."



DAMIAN STROHMEYER

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **BILL BELICHICK**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 3

QB	**TOM BRADY**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		16	565	371	65.7
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		4,398	28	13	96.2
RB	**LAURENCE MARONEY**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		15	194	757	3.9
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		14	99	7.1	9
WR	**RANDY MOSS**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	83	1,264	13
WR	**WES WELKER**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		14	123	1,348	4
WR	**JULIAN EDELMAN**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		11	37	359	1
TE	***ALGE CRUMPLER***	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	27	222	1
LT	**MATT LIGHT**	G	HT	WT	
		11	6' 4"	305	
LG	**DAN CONNOLLY**	G	HT	WT	
		14	6' 4"	313	
C	**DAN KOPPEN**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 2"	296	
RG	**STEPHEN NEAL**	G	HT	WT	
		12	6' 4"	305	
RT	**SEBASTIAN VOLLMER**	G	HT	WT	
		14	6' 8"	315	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 11

DE	***GERARD WARREN***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	35	2	0
NT	**VINCE WILFORK**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	43	0	0
DE	**MIKE WRIGHT**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	35	5	0
LB	**TULLY BANTA-CAIN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	55	10	0
LB	**JEROD MAYO**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	103	1½	0
LB	**GARY GUYTON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	85	1½	0
LB	**DERRICK BURGESS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	34	5	0
CB	**DARIUS BUTLER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		14	35	0	3
FS	**BRANDON McGOWAN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	79	0	0
SS	**BRANDON MERIWEATHER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	83	0	5
CB	**LEIGH BODDEN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	55	0	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	***ZOLTAN MESKO (R)***	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		52	44.5	40.9
K	**STEPHEN GOSTKOWSKI**	FG	XP	POINTS
		26–31	47–47	125
PR	**WES WELKER**	RET	AVG	TD
		27	12.5	0
KR	**MATTHEW SLATER**	RET	AVG	TD
		11	24.5	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Miami DOLPHINS

An offense looking for an adrenaline shot has found itself a game-breaker

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 7–9

September
12 at Buffalo
19 at Minnesota
26 N.Y. Jets

October
4 New England (M)
10 BYE
17 at Green Bay
24 Pittsburgh
31 at Cincinnati

November
7 at Baltimore
14 Tennessee
18 Chicago (T)
28 at Oakland

December
5 Cleveland
12 at N.Y. Jets
19 Buffalo
26 Detroit

January
2 at New England

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T16**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.500**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
Six of Miami's first eight are against 2009 playoff teams, and while the season's second half looks easier, cold-weather dates against the Jets and the Pats loom. The Dolphins don't play a day game at home until Week 7, so they shouldn't have to endure intolerably hot afternoons, but they get a short week for a Thursday-night matchup against the Bears in Week 11. At least they're home the Sunday before.



HOT BRAND Marshall has blown away the Fins with his blend of physicality and finesse.

BILL FRAKES

UNLIKE ANOTHER preternaturally talented newcomer to Miami, Brandon Marshall did not *decide* to take his talents to South Beach. The Dolphins traded for him on April 14, sending a pair of second-round picks to Denver. Still, as he perched his 6' 4", 230-pound frame on a chair in the players' cafeteria after an August training-camp session while his new teammates carbo-loaded at the tables around him, Marshall insisted, earnestly, that he couldn't be more thrilled with where he landed this off-season.

Notoriously troublesome during his four seasons with the Broncos, the 26-year-old wideout said he's happy with the contract extension the Dolphins gave him (four years, $24 million guaranteed) and happy with his new quarterback, the strong-armed Chad Henne. "I wouldn't change my situation for the world," Marshall said. "Chad has command and leadership in the huddle, and every guy on this team respects him. And the things he's able to do with his arm are unbelievable. He makes me say, 'Wow.' "

Even as controversy swirled around him in Denver—he was suspended by the Broncos for nine days last August for what amounted to petulance, and he's had numerous scrapes with the law, including a 2007 guilty plea for driving while impaired—Marshall's production drew *wows* too. Against the Colts in December, Marshall set an NFL single-game record with 21 receptions. Over the past three years only the Patriots' Wes Welker had more catches than Marshall's 307 or more yards after the catch



NFL PLAYERS

DRIVING 786 MILES TO THE STADIUM. TAILGATING ON A SUNDAY MORNING. SURE IT'S JUST A GAME.

For the days you can't be there, there's always NFL Mobile.
Live streaming video of Thursday and Sunday night games, NFL Network, and NFL RedZone. With NFL Mobile, this season football comes to you. Only from Verizon.
Download NFL Mobile at **www.verizonwireless.com/nfl** or **TEXT "NFL" to 8915.**

RULE THE AIR

verizon | NFL

Official Wireless Service Provider of the NFL

Starting 9/1, a $10 monthly V CAST Video on Demand subscription is required to view video content.

Message rates may apply. Available on select 3G Smartphones. Coverage not available everywhere. ©2010 Verizon. ©2010 NFL Properties LLC. Team names/logos/indicia are trademarks of the teams indicated. All other NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League. NFL PLAYERS is a trademark of National Football League Players Incorporated.

than Marshall's 1,515. Not even Welker gained more receiving yards after contact than Marshall's 727 in that span.

That last statistic indicates a quality that Henne witnessed firsthand early in camp: Marshall can be a finesse receiver when it's required, but he can also physically dominate opponents, like the safety he once was. (Marshall started seven games at the position as a junior at Central Florida and led the team in tackles that year.) "First practice of training camp, we were in seven-on-seven, and he threw the corner—Sean Smith, who's not a small guy [6' 3", 214 pounds]—on his butt," Henne recalls with a grin. "He's wide open for a 25-yard fade, and we score."

In Marshall the Dolphins have added a distinctively skilled hybrid, both a possession receiver and the long-coveted big-play threat that now-jettisoned '07 first-round pick Ted Ginn never became. "When the ball's in the air, we're confident that no matter where he is, he's going to come down with it," says running back Ricky Williams, who first joined the Dolphins in 2002. "We've had good receivers here in the past but not a game-changer like Brandon."

Last season, even in the Broncos' quick-pass system, Marshall had four receptions of 40 or more yards, equaling Miami's output as a team. "We can be a really dynamic offense," says left tackle Jake Long, who has made the Pro Bowl in each of his first two seasons.

The Dolphins haven't finished in the NFL's top 10 in total offense since 1995, but Marshall's presence isn't the only reason that streak could end. Henne, a 2008 second-round pick and Long's teammate for seven seasons now (they spent four together at Michigan), was more than a game manager by the end of last season—his first as the starter—when he topped 300 yards in three of four December games. Now he draws nothing but raves from teammates and coaches for his talent, his unflappable nature and his durability. "He can throw," coach Tony Sparano puts it simply, "and throw and throw and throw and throw."

And the Dolphins can run and run and run and run. Last year Williams and Ronnie Brown were the league's fourth most productive rushing tandem, combining for 1,769 yards, even though a fractured foot ended Brown's season in Week 10. The sixth-year back is healthy once more, and he and the 33-year-old Williams could become the seventh pair of teammates to each surpass 1,000 yards rushing—a feat first accomplished by Miami's Larry Csonka and Mercury Morris in 1972.

That season the Dolphins went undefeated and won Super Bowl VII. While a trip to Dallas in February doesn't appear to be within the Dolphins' reach this year, a postseason berth certainly does. —B.R.

SPOTLIGHT

Karlos Dansby, Linebacker

THE TRADE for wideout Brandon Marshall was the biggest news of the Dolphins' off-season, but their main focus was clear: revamping a 3–4 defense that ranked 25th in points allowed last year and was the central reason why the team regressed from 11–5 and AFC East champions to 7–9 and also-rans. By the time executive vice president Bill Parcells used eight of his nine draft picks on defenders—including first-round end Jared Odrick out of Penn State and second-round linebacker Koa Misi out of Utah, two of six probable defensive starters who are 24 or younger—he had already brought in a veteran to lead them. The hulking (6' 4", 250 pounds) Karlos Dansby, Arizona's leading tackler since his rookie year in 2004, became a Dolphin on March 5, the first day of 2010 free agency. The five-year, $43 million contract the Dolphins dangled, at the time the largest ever for an inside linebacker, surely expedited Dansby's decision, but even more alluring, Dansby insists, was the opportunity to be the centerpiece of a young and rising unit. "It's an organization that's on the turn, and I wanted to be part of a winner," he says. "S---, we rollin' right now."

Dansby, 28, represents a significant upgrade over last year's starter, the departed Akin Ayodele, who had neither a sack nor an interception in 2009 and whose 71 tackles were not even in the top 50 among linebackers. Dolphins coach Tony Sparano repeatedly called Dansby the most impressive player in training camp this year. "This guy gets his hand on the football constantly," says Sparano. "Sometimes when he's out there, he looks like he's 12 feet tall."



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **TONY SPARANO**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 17

QB	**CHAD HENNE**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		14	451	274	60.8
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		2,878	12	14	75.2
RB	**RONNIE BROWN**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		9	147	648	4.4
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		14	98	7.0	8
FB	**LOUSAKA POLITE**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		16	37	123	3.3
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		11	51	4.6	0
WR	***BRANDON MARSHALL***	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		15	101	1,120	10
WR	**BRIAN HARTLINE**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	31	506	4
TE	**ANTHONY FASANO**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		14	31	339	2
LT	**JAKE LONG**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 7"	317	
LG	***RICHIE INCOGNITO***	G	HT	WT	
		12	6' 3"	330	
C	**JOE BERGER**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 5"	315	
RG	***JOHN JERRY (R)***	G	HT	WT	
		13	6' 5"	328	
RT	**VERNON CAREY**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 5"	340	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 22

DE	**KENDALL LANGFORD**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	43	2½	0
NT	**RANDY STARKS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	56	7	0
DE	***JARED ODRICK (R)***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	43	7	0
LB	***KOA MISI (R)***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		12	71	5	0
LB	**CHANNING CROWDER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	52	1	1
LB	***KARLOS DANSBY***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	109	1	1
LB	**CAMERON WAKE**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		14	23	5½	0
CB	**VONTAE DAVIS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	51	0	4
FS	**CHRIS CLEMONS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		11	13	0	0
SS	**YEREMIAH BELL**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	114	1½	3
CB	**SEAN SMITH**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	39	0	0

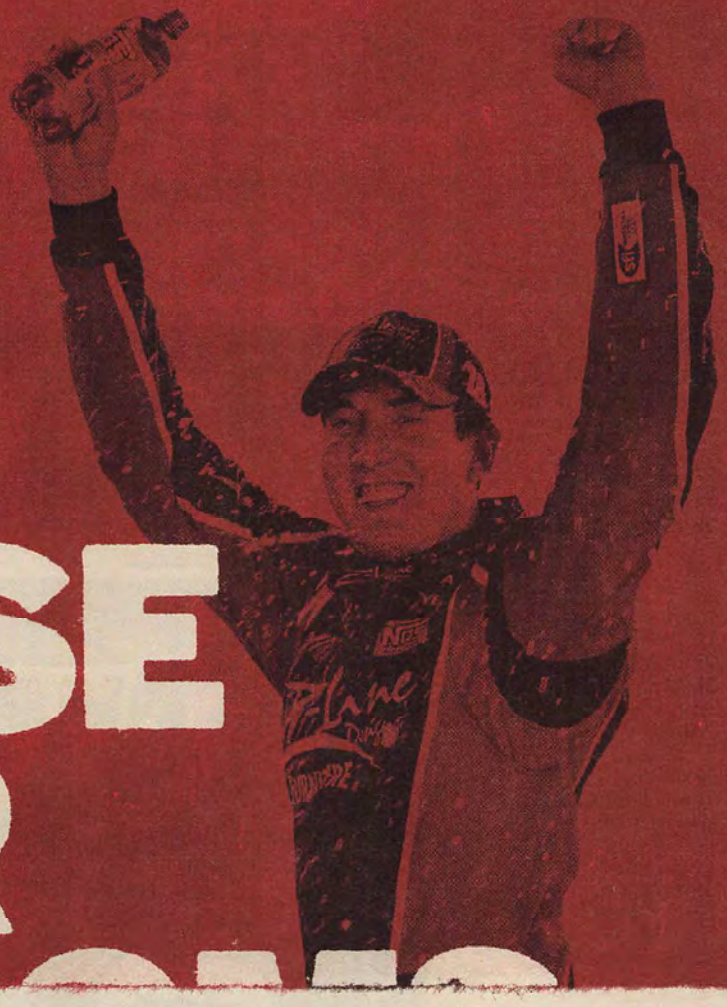
SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**BRANDON FIELDS**	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		75	46.3	39.8
K	**DAN CARPENTER**	FG	XP	POINTS
		25–28	37–38	112
PR	**DAVONE BESS**	RET	AVG	TD
		28	7.5	0
KR	**PATRICK COBBS**	RET	AVG	TD
		16	22.6	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

RICHARD C. LEWIS/ICON SMI

TOYOTA
moving forward



WE RAISE OUR BROOMS.



AUG 18-2010



AUG 20-2010



AUG 21-2010

Congratulations to KYLE BUSCH on becoming the first NASCAR driver to sweep three races at the same track in the same week. For more, visit TOYOTARACING.COM

AN OFFICIAL PASSENGER CAR OF NASCAR

The NASCAR Bar logo is a trademark owned by the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, Inc. ©2010 Joe Gibbs Racing. "Kyle Busch"SM and "#18"SM are licensed under authority of Joe Gibbs Racing, Huntersville, NC. ©2010 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

4 Buffalo BILLS

A mostly anonymous team is looking to sneak up on people. Not likely

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 6–10

September
12 Miami
19 at Green Bay
26 at New England

October
3 N.Y. Jets
10 Jacksonville
17 BYE
24 at Baltimore
31 at Kansas City

November
7 Chicago*
14 Detroit
21 at Cincinnati
28 Pittsburgh

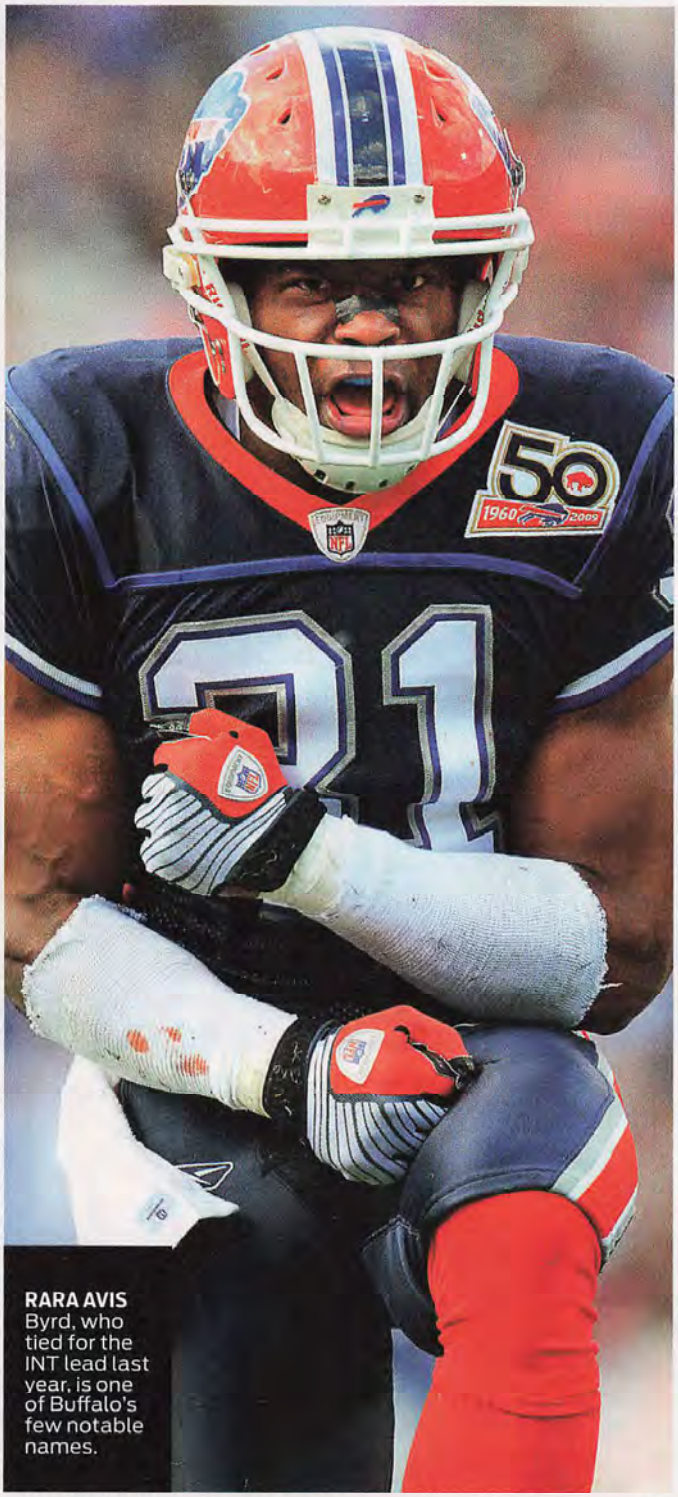
December
5 at Minnesota
12 Cleveland
19 at Miami
26 New England

January
2 at N.Y. Jets

*In Toronto

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T16**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.500**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
Buffalonians won't have to worry about staying up late. The Bills are one of two teams (along with the Browns) whose games are all at 1 p.m. Eastern time on Sundays. That should tell you how dimly the networks view Buffalo's prospects. There are no West Coast trips, but the out-of-division road schedule—including Green Bay, Baltimore, Cincinnati and Minnesota—is daunting.



RARA AVIS Byrd, who tied for the INT lead last year, is one of Buffalo's few notable names.

KELLEN MICAH/ICON SMI

DOES THIS have anything to do with the Ocho and Terrell?" Ryan Fitzpatrick, the Bills' leading passer in 2009, asked when told early in training camp that a reporter wanted to talk to him. No, it didn't . . . at least, not entirely. But Fitzpatrick's assumption that the questions would be about two of his former teammates—Terrell Owens joined fellow receiver Chad Ochocinco's Bengals in July—and none of his current ones was understandable. After a one-season experiment with T.O., who took with him his reality show, his breakfast cereal and most of the flashbulbs that lit up evening practices a summer ago, Buffalo was left with a deficit of star power in a division loaded with it. Forget the Dolphins' No-Name Defense of the '70s. The Bills are the No-Name Team of '10. "We kind of fit the mold of a Buffalo team: blue-collar, hardworking," says Fitzpatrick. "We don't have a lot of big-name guys."

The Bills' most prominent player, in fact, might turn out to be a guy who has yet to see a regular-season snap: running back C.J. Spiller, the ninth pick out of Clemson, who announced his arrival with a stunning 31-yard touchdown run in his second exhibition game, during which he left three Colts—including two 2009 Pro Bowlers, defensive end Robert Mathis and safety Antoine Bethea—grasping at air. Spiller joins an already deep backfield corps, which includes 1,000-yard rushers Fred Jackson and

GO TO CHUNKY.COM AND

SAVE

$5.00*



ON CAMPBELL'S® CHUNKY™ SOUPS



THE OFFICIAL SOUP SPONSOR OF THE NFL

©2010 NFL Properties LLC. All NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League.

*Multiple coupons worth $5 total.

©2010 CSC BRANDS LP

Marshawn Lynch. The rookie's presence will occasion a new philosophy for coach Chan Gailey, who liked to rely on single workhorse backs in his previous stops, notably as offensive coordinator at Kansas City. "I gotta change," says Gailey, 58. "With three guys, if it turns out to be three guys, we've got to find a way to use all of them."

The other unit that boasts something approaching star quality is the secondary. The Bills trailed only the Jets in pass defense last season, even though their starters missed a combined 26 games to injury. Wide receiver Steve Johnson—the favorite to fill the void opposite Lee Evans left by Owens's departure—has done his part to get at least one of them, NFL interceptions leader Jairus Byrd (tied, with nine), some recognition. In the off-season Johnson produced a rap to honor the second-year free safety out of Oregon called *Byrd Flyin High*, which samples a Juelz Santana/Lil Wayne track ("Picked off by the Duck like Byrd, man/Fly guy Jairus, flyin' like birds, man").

At most other spots on the field the Bills' talent seems to match their celebrity. Of particular concern is an offensive line that allowed 103 quarterback hits last season, second most in the league, and added only journeyman right tackle Cornell Green. Among quarterbacks who made more than 30 dropbacks, only the clueless former Raider JaMarcus Russell was sacked on a higher percentage than Trent Edwards (11.2%), who should again open the season as the starter. The line was the major contributor to Edwards's regression (his QB rating dropped from 85.4 to 73.8), his injury (he suffered a concussion on Oct. 18) and his benching in favor of Fitzpatrick in Week 11. The offense in general was futile—ranked 30th in the league—and Owens never clicked. His average of 3.4 catches was his worst since his rookie year of 1996. Unless Buffalo's low-profile linemen unexpectedly improve, it's hard to see the offense becoming more productive.

Edwards was derisively nicknamed Captain Checkdown by Bills fans last season for his inability to get the ball downfield, an unfair tag given the shakiness of his line. Now he's trying to recapture some forward momentum in Gailey's offense. "I'm a glass-half-full type guy," says Edwards, who's entering his fourth season. "It's difficult sometimes to go through the ups and downs, the bumps and bruises, and come back out still confident."

The Bills are doing their best to approach the year with optimism, and they view their anonymity as a strength. "When you're big-name people, there tends to be a lot of division, egos involved," says Byrd. "We're all about chemistry." But there seems little reason to think the Bills' chemistry will produce a positive reaction in a stacked AFC East. Gailey dismisses the common perception that the Bills will be laggards, pointing to the division's last two surprise playoff teams. "Two years ago they weren't talking about the Dolphins," he says. "Last year they weren't talking about the Jets. So, that's my reaction." He's right in one regard: No one is talking about his Bills. —B.R.

SPOTLIGHT

Aaron Maybin, Linebacker

THE BILLS had a pair of first-round draft picks in 2009, and things got testy between those two players during the second practice this year. Maybin, selected 11th out of Penn State, shoved a running back to the ground well after the end of a play in an 11-on-11 drill, sparking a scrum. As tempers flared, right guard Eric Wood (taken 28th out of Louisville) shouted at Maybin, "Give back some of that money you ain't f-----' earned!"

It was typical training camp trash talk, but the outburst also rang true. Wood signed a five-year, $12.3 million contract early in last summer's camp, then started the first 10 games before Jaguars tackle Montavious Stanley turned two of Wood's leg bones into four. Maybin held out until late August, then signed a five-year, $25 million deal. After that, more or less he did nothing. No starts, no sacks, no interceptions and just 11 solo tackles.

Under new defensive coordinator George Edwards the Bills will employ a base 3–4 defense for the first time in nine years, and they've shifted the 6' 4", 250-pound Maybin from undersized defensive end to weakside linebacker, where he'll be expected to fill the pass-rushing void left by Aaron Schobel, Buffalo's sacks leader for eight of the last nine seasons. "I love it, really," says Maybin of the move. "I think it's a better fit for me. This type of defense lets me get in space and use my athleticism, my quickness, my speed and my explosiveness."

In other words Maybin's now in prime position to earn his money.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **CHAN GAILEY**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 30

QB **TRENT EDWARDS**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
8	183	110	60.1
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
1,169	6	7	73.8

RB ***C.J. SPILLER (R)***

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	216	1,212	5.6
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
36	503	14.0	16

FB **COREY McINTYRE**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
15	5	34	6.8
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
7	55	7.9	0

WR **LEE EVANS**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	44	612	7

WR **STEVE JOHNSON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
5	2	10	0

TE **JONATHAN STUPAR**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	6	40	0

LT **DEMETRIUS BELL**

G	HT	WT
8	6' 5"	307

LG **ANDY LEVITRE**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 2"	305

C **GEOFF HANGARTNER**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	301

RG **ERIC WOOD**

G	HT	WT
10	6' 4"	315

RT ***CORNELL GREEN***

G	HT	WT
12	6' 6"	315

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 19

DE **MARCUS STROUD**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	56	2	0

NT **KYLE WILLIAMS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	66	4	0

DE ***DWAN EDWARDS***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	47	1	0

LB **CHRIS KELSAY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	62	5	0

LB ***ANDRA DAVIS***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	90	3½	0

LB **PAUL POSLUSZNY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	111	1	3

LB ***REGGIE TORBOR***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	37	1	1

CB **TERRENCE McGEE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	48	0	1

FS **JAIRUS BYRD**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	45	0	9

SS **DONTE WHITNER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	57	0	2

CB **DRAYTON FLORENCE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	60	0	1

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **BRIAN MOORMAN**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
90	46.6	40.2

K **RIAN LINDELL**

FG	XP	POINTS
28–33	24–24	108

PR **ROSCOE PARRISH**

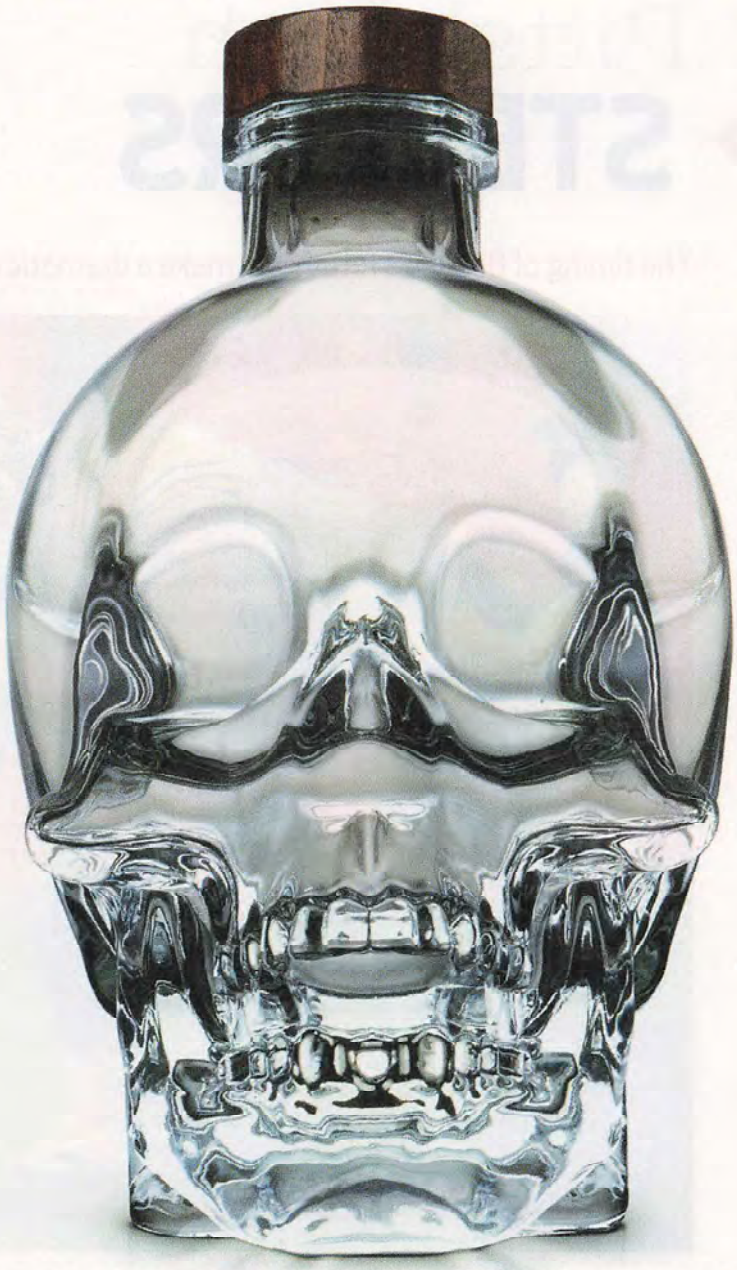
RET	AVG	TD
24	5.5	0

KR **LEODIS McKELVIN**

RET	AVG	TD
5	24.2	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

COURTESY OF BUFFALO BILLS



CRYSTAL HEAD

VODKA

QUADRUPLE DISTILLED.

TRIPLE FILTERED THROUGH HERKIMER DIAMONDS.

AQUIFER WATER. NO ADDITIVES. PURE SPIRIT.

EXPLORECRYSTALHEAD.COM

Use your head... drink responsibly. ©2010 Crystal Head Vodka® Produc of Canada. Gran vodka 40% alc./Vol. Imported by Wilson Daniels, ltd. St. Helena, Ca.

1 Pittsburgh STEELERS

The timing of Big Ben's return will make a dramatic difference in Steeltown

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 9–7

September
12 Atlanta
19 at Tennessee
26 at Tampa Bay

October
3 Baltimore
10 BYE
17 Cleveland
24 at Miami
31 at New Orleans

November
8 at Cincinnati (M)
14 New England
21 Oakland
28 at Buffalo

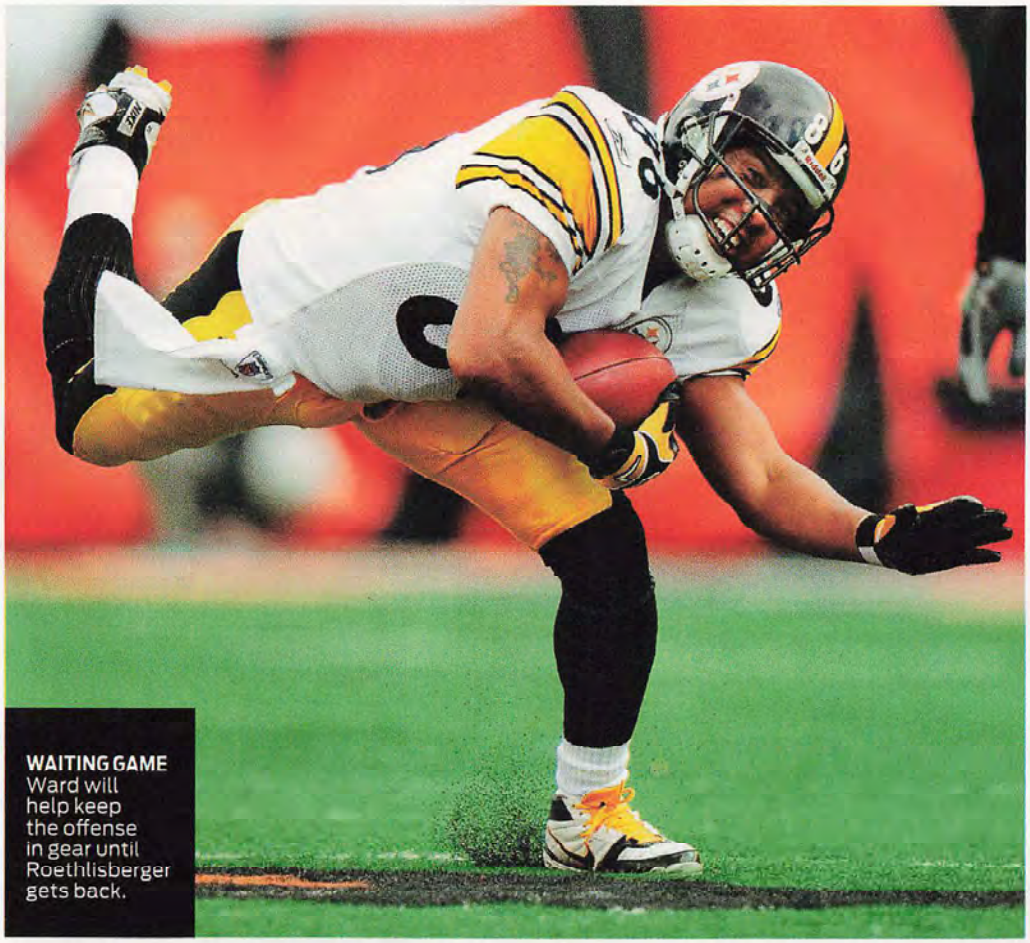
December
5 at Baltimore
12 Cincinnati
19 N.Y. Jets
23 Carolina (T)

January
2 at Cleveland

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **21**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.492**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The Steelers have the weakest schedule in the division, which should ease the sting of Ben Roethlisberger's suspension. If it's only for four games (instead of six), he has a chance to get rolling quickly, with matchups against three teams—the Browns, Dolphins and Saints—that struggled on D last year. All were in the bottom 10 against the pass in 2009.



WAITING GAME Ward will help keep the offense in gear until Roethlisberger gets back.

BILL FRAKES

THE STEELERS aren't big on change. The Rooneys—first Art, then son Dan and now grandson Art II—have run the team since its founding in 1933. Pittsburgh has had three coaches since the Vietnam War and has used the same training camp site, St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., for 43 years. Of the 84 players on the roster or injured list in mid-August, 79 were either Steelers last year, former Steelers back trying to win jobs, players trying to make their first NFL team or players off the street who had no other demand for their services. Of the five veteran free agents with significant pro experience whom Pittsburgh signed, only one, Flozell Adams, has a chance to start—and he's a 35-year-old stopgap who was picked up only because starting right tackle Willie Colon tore his right Achilles tendon in June.

We may never know how close Pittsburgh came to a sea change at quarterback this off-season, after Ben Roethlisberger was accused of sexual assault for the second time in eight months. The two-time Super Bowl winner was not charged in either incident, but his behavior led commissioner Roger Goodell to suspend him for six games at the start of this season. While the Steelers traded Super Bowl MVP Santonio Holmes to the Jets after his second violation of the NFL substance abuse policy, they gave Roethlisberger a final chance to stop being a lout. As part of his rehab effort, he moved his father and stepmother to the Pittsburgh suburbs for support and turned to former Steelers coach Bill Cowher and onetime running back Merril Hoge for guidance.

So what about rehabbing the 2010 Steelers? As Goodell mulled reducing Roethlisberger's suspension to four games—the likely scenario at week's end—Pittsburgh spent training camp deciding on a fill-in. Coach Mike Tomlin could choose between the experienced but slow-footed 30-year-old Byron Leftwich, a seven-year veteran with 49 career starts, or the quick and raw Dennis Dixon, 25, who's played in two NFL games in his two seasons. Tomlin seemed inclined to start Leftwich in the Sept. 12 opener against the Falcons, and Leftwich's beautiful 68-yard touchdown to Mike Wallace in a preseason win over the Giants certainly helped his cause. But Tomlin could make a change within the first month. Pittsburgh hosts the division rival Ravens in Week 4, and Dixon showed promise in his one start, an overtime loss at Baltimore last year. There's no doubt the aggressive Ravens pass rushers would rather set their sights on Leftwich than the slippery Dixon. "Whoever's in there," says Tomlin, "the expectations don't change. We have to win, and the players will respond."

Once the preseason ends, Roethlisberger cannot be on Steelers property, work out with teammates or have contact with the coaches. He'll stay in shape by using a personal trainer and doing football drills each day. "Whatever happens," he said in training camp, "I'm in the best shape of my life right now, and I'm going to stay that way. No doubt in my mind, I'll be ready to go when I get back."

If Goodell reduces the suspension, Roethlisberger could begin working with the team on Oct. 4, heading into Pittsburgh's bye; that would give him 13 days to prepare for a return against the Browns at Heinz Field. If the suspension isn't reduced, he'd be banned from contact with the Steelers until Oct. 25, just six days before perhaps their toughest game of the year, at New Orleans. Thirteen days to prepare for a division also-ran at home or six days to get ready for the champion Saints on the road. Goodell's call will absolutely be season-altering for the Steelers.

Pittsburgh has seen a different Roethlisberger this summer—far more fan-friendly, not as aloof in the locker room. As one of his friends says, "Ben just wasn't equipped to be a famous person. He didn't know how to handle it. Now you'll see more of a normal guy who just wants to play football." Veteran wideout Hines Ward, who has been bluntly critical of Roethlisberger at times, said the quarterback has been making "a valiant effort" to be a better teammate.

"He's determined to handle all things in his life better," says Art Rooney II, "and he's been doing a good job so far."

Can Roethlisberger turn his life around? For the sake of the Steelers, and his future in Pittsburgh, he'd better. —*Peter King*

DAMIAN STROHMEYER

SPOTLIGHT

Mike Wallace, Wide receiver

IN THREE YEARS at Mississippi and one with the Steelers, Wallace has caught 140 passes, total. So how can he be qualified to replace Santonio Holmes, a Super Bowl MVP coming off the best year of his career? Losing Holmes's 79 receptions, particularly with a backup quarterback playing at least the first quarter of the season, presents a huge headache for the Steelers—and a huge challenge for Wallace. Confidence, at least, won't be an issue for the 24-year-old. "My plan," he says, "is to go to the Pro Bowl ASAP. ASAP, to me, is this year."

The 6-foot, 199-pound Wallace has more speed than Holmes; he ran a sub-4.3-second 40-yard dash at Mississippi and gained a league-leading 19.4 yards per reception as a rookie. It's the fine points of the position he must master. He's had to become a more disciplined route-runner while learning how to get in and out of cuts more quickly, so that he can catch balls thrown to spots. That was his mission throughout the summer, when he watched a lot of tape on Holmes. One day at camp Wallace stayed on the field after practice for 25 minutes, doing nothing but running sideline and corner routes on cornerbacks.

The Steelers have two intermediate targets to troll the middle of the field in wide receiver Hines Ward and tight end Heath Miller. But no one on the roster can match Wallace as a long-ball threat, and he ran countless deep routes in camp and in preseason games, trying to get on the same page quickly with the quarterbacks. Wallace will have to deal with safety-over-the-top coverage, which he didn't often see as a third receiver last year, but that doesn't faze him either. "I've been waiting for this moment," Wallace says, "and there's no doubt I'll do it." The Steelers are gambling he can.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MIKE TOMLIN**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 7

QB	**BEN ROETHLISBERGER**				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	15	506	337	66.6	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	4,328	26	12	100.5	
RB	**RASHARD MENDENHALL**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	242	1,108	4.6	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	25	261	10.4	8	
FB	**FRANK SUMMERS**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	2	0	0	—	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	0	0	—	0	
WR	**HINES WARD**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	95	1,167	6	
WR	**MIKE WALLACE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	39	756	6	
TE	**HEATH MILLER**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	76	789	6	
LT	**MAX STARKS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6'8"	345		
LG	**CHRIS KEMOEATU**				
	G	HT	WT		
	12	6'3"	344		
C	***MAURKICE POUNCEY (R)***				
	G	HT	WT		
	14	6'4"	304		
RG	**TRAI ESSEX**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6'5"	324		
RT	***FLOZELL ADAMS***				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6'7"	338		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 5

DE	**AARON SMITH**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	5	9	2	0
NT	**CASEY HAMPTON**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	43	2½	0
DE	**BRETT KEISEL**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	54	3	0
LB	**LaMARR WOODLEY**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	62	13½	0
LB	**JAMES FARRIOR**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	102	3	1
LB	**LAWRENCE TIMMONS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	78	7	0
LB	**JAMES HARRISON**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	79	10	0
CB	**IKE TAYLOR**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	62	1	1
FS	**RYAN CLARK**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	89	0	3
SS	**TROY POLAMALU**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	5	20	0	3
CB	***BRYANT MCFADDEN***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	69	0	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**DANIEL SEPULVEDA**		
	PUNTS	AVG	NET
	72	42.7	37.1
K	**JEFF REED**		
	FG	XP	POINTS
	27-31	41-41	122
PR	**STEFAN LOGAN**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	30	9.3	0
KR	**STEFAN LOGAN**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	55	26.7	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 Baltimore RAVENS

The defense has question marks in the secondary and no apparent answers

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 9-7

September
13 at N.Y. Jets (M)
19 at Cincinnati
26 Cleveland

October
3 at Pittsburgh
10 Denver
17 at New England
24 Buffalo
31 BYE

November
7 Miami
11 at Atlanta (T)
21 at Carolina
28 Tampa Bay

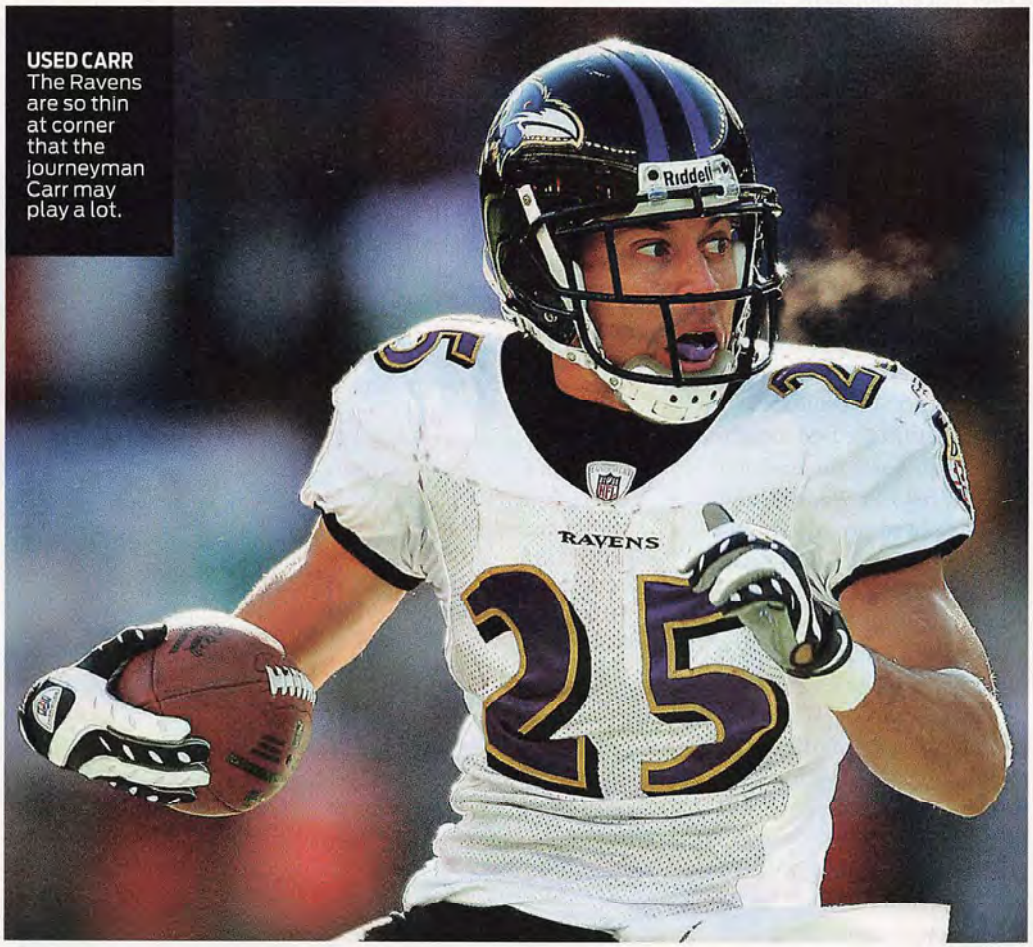
December
5 Pittsburgh
13 at Houston (M)
19 New Orleans
26 at Cleveland

January
2 Cincinnati

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T12**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.508**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
The NFL's trash-talking title will be on the line in the first two weeks, when Baltimore plays the equally mouthy Jets and Bengals. More to the playoff point, the Ravens only face one top passing team in the first half of '10 (and Pittsburgh won't have Ben Roethlisberger in Week 4), so their injury-depleted secondary will be able to jell—in time to take on the Saints in wintry Baltimore.



USED CARR The Ravens are so thin at corner that the journeyman Carr may play a lot.

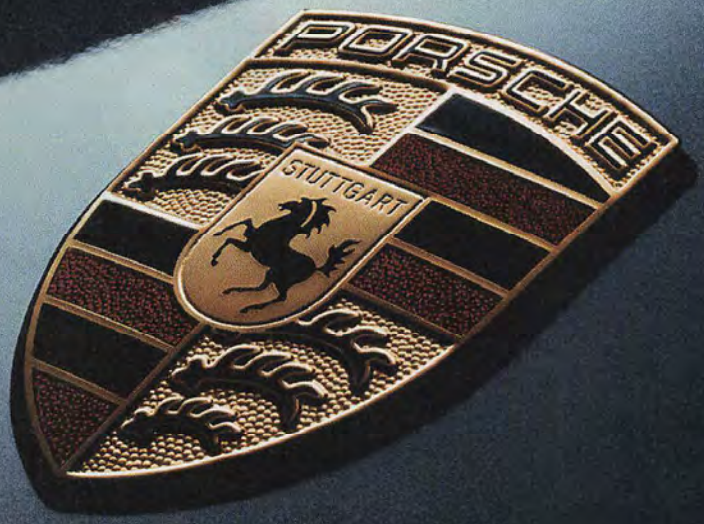
ELSA/GETTY IMAGES

EARLY IN the off-season, Ravens defensive assistants Clarence Brooks and Ted Monachino put all of their linemen and linebackers through what the team called Pass Rush School. Fundamentals of hand placement, paths to the quarterback, footwork and coordinating moves with teammates on the rush were among the lessons taught and retaught. "We tried to be great teachers of the basic mechanics of the rush," says defensive coordinator Greg Mattison. "Sometimes, when you draft a guy to rush the passer and he had great success in college, you think, O.K., we got ourselves a pass rusher. But it's not that easy. The guy has to continue to grow to get to the quarterback in this league."

There was a reason for the defensive staff's new curriculum: This year there is no Super Bowl contender with a weakness at one position as glaring as Baltimore's is at cornerback. The team's top corner, Domonique Foxworth, is out for the season with a right ACL tear, meaning the starters are Raiders reject Fabian Washington, 27, and a second-year player from Nicholls State, Lardarius Webb, who are both trying to rebound from late-2009 ACL surgery. (Both Washington and Webb are expected to be ready come Week 1.) With those question marks in the defensive backfield, the Ravens' front seven will have to graduate Pass Rush School quickly—and with flying colors.

Under former defensive coordinator Rex Ryan, Baltimore deployed the league's most exotic blitz packages—four rushers over one gap, for

Many of the best vehicles in the world start with Mobil 1.





©2010 Exxon Mobil Corporation. Mobil, Mobil 1 and the 1 icon are trademarks of Exxon Mobil Corporation or one of its subsidiaries.

STEP UP TO MOBIL 1. Four out of the top five auto manufacturers choose Mobil 1 for one or more of their flagship vehicles. Why? Because they know Mobil 1 has been proven time and again on both the track and the road. So step up to the one. Mobil 1. Get the full story at mobil1.com.

Mobil 1

instance—and the reward was usually worth the risk. (From 2005 through '08 the team ranked second in total defense.) But because the Ravens are not inclined to strand Washington and Webb on islands without safety support, the team will be unable to rely on the blitz as much. With the NFL's growing emphasis on the throwing game (teams averaged a healthy 35.4 pass plays a game last year), Mattison & Co. know that they'll be exposing their subpar corners in man coverage whenever they do.

"We have to be relentless in both the four- and three-man rush this year," says defensive tackle Haloti Ngata. "We don't want to leave our corners without help. We've all got to rush better without blitzing."

The problem at corner is exacerbated by the health of safety Ed Reed, who turns 32 on Sept. 11, is coming off surgery on his hip and has a chronic neck problem. He spent the early days of training camp not practicing but rather shuttling between camp in Westminster, Md., and his hip rehab specialist in Atlanta. Desperate for secondary help, Baltimore scouted every team in person the first two weeks of the preseason. The staff made a depth chart of the league's backup corners, dusted off college reports on players they liked two and three drafts ago and looked to see if any were worth pursuing in a trade.

Some of the pressure, regardless of any late-preseason roster shuffling, will fall on veteran cornerback Chris Carr. But he's had 10 career starts in five seasons with Oakland, Tennessee and Baltimore, and at 5' 10" he'd be in over his head if asked to start for a prolonged period. "I don't know what everyone's saying about us, and it doesn't matter," Carr says. "I watch the History Channel and HBO, not sports. But I think we're a good secondary, and we have a chance to be elite. We had the eighth-rated pass defense in the league last year with all the injuries we put up with. We're a confident group, whatever outsiders think of us."

Ravens coach John Harbaugh agrees. "We don't need a Revis Island kind of guy here," he says, referring to the Jets shutdown cornerback, Darrelle Revis. "We need good players at the position playing at the top of their game. The only thing I'm worried about—say, with a guy like Lardarius Webb—is that a guy might be back playing, but will he be back playing as explosively and confidently as he did right away?"

Over the last decade Baltimore's defense has always played aggressively, with a chip on its collective shoulder. It's been rare that an offensive coordinator has studied the Ravens and said he can see an obvious weakness. But they will get thrown on this year, and to be a playoff team they will need to win their share of shootouts. It's been a long time since Baltimore has entered a season thinking that way. —P.K.

SPOTLIGHT

Joe Flacco, Quarterback

WITH THE Ravens' off-season acquisitions at skill positions—Anquan Boldin and Donte' Stallworth at receiver, draft picks Ed Dickson and Dennis Pitta at tight end—they now have the depth to be a top five scoring team. (Baltimore ranked ninth last year.) Achieving that will start with third-year quarterback Flacco, who will be asked to improve on his ascending performance in 2009.

The one thing he doesn't have to work on is his confidence. Asked in mid-August if he hoped the Jets will be without cornerback Darrelle Revis when the Ravens play New York in Week 1, Flacco shrugged. "If he plays, he plays," he said. "We're going to attack both their corners anyway."

He has been helped this off-season by two arrivals: quarterbacks coach Jim Zorn, the former coach of the Redskins, and 33-year-old backup quarterback Marc Bulger, who had big years with the Rams. They've helped by speeding up Flacco's reads and his overall game. Zorn, Flacco says, has taught him to "be compact, be explosive at all times, don't waste motion." Bulger was schooled in Mike Martz's offense in St. Louis to throw to precise spots before the receiver turned his head toward the passer. "Seeing how Marc trusts his receivers," Flacco says, "that's where I want to get with them."

Getting comfortable with a precise route runner like Boldin and a deep threat like Stallworth was Flacco's big task this summer. "He had two passes today that were [more] anticipated and quicker than any in his three years here," said offensive coordinator Cam Cameron as training camp closed. The Bulger and Zorn influences are working.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JOHN HARBAUGH**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 13

QB	**JOE FLACCO**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		16	499	315	63.1
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		3,613	21	12	88.9
RB	**RAY RICE**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		16	254	1,339	5.3
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		78	702	9.0	8
FB	**LE'RON McCLAIN**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		16	46	180	3.9
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		21	141	6.7	2
WR	***ANQUAN BOLDIN***	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		15	84	1,024	5
WR	**DERRICK MASON**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	73	1,028	7
TE	**TODD HEAP**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	53	593	6
LT	**MICHAEL OHER**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	309	
LG	**BEN GRUBBS**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 3"	315	
C	**MATT BIRK**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	309	
RG	**MARSHAL YANDA**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 3"	310	
RT	**JARED GAITHER**	G	HT	WT	
		11	6' 9"	330	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 3

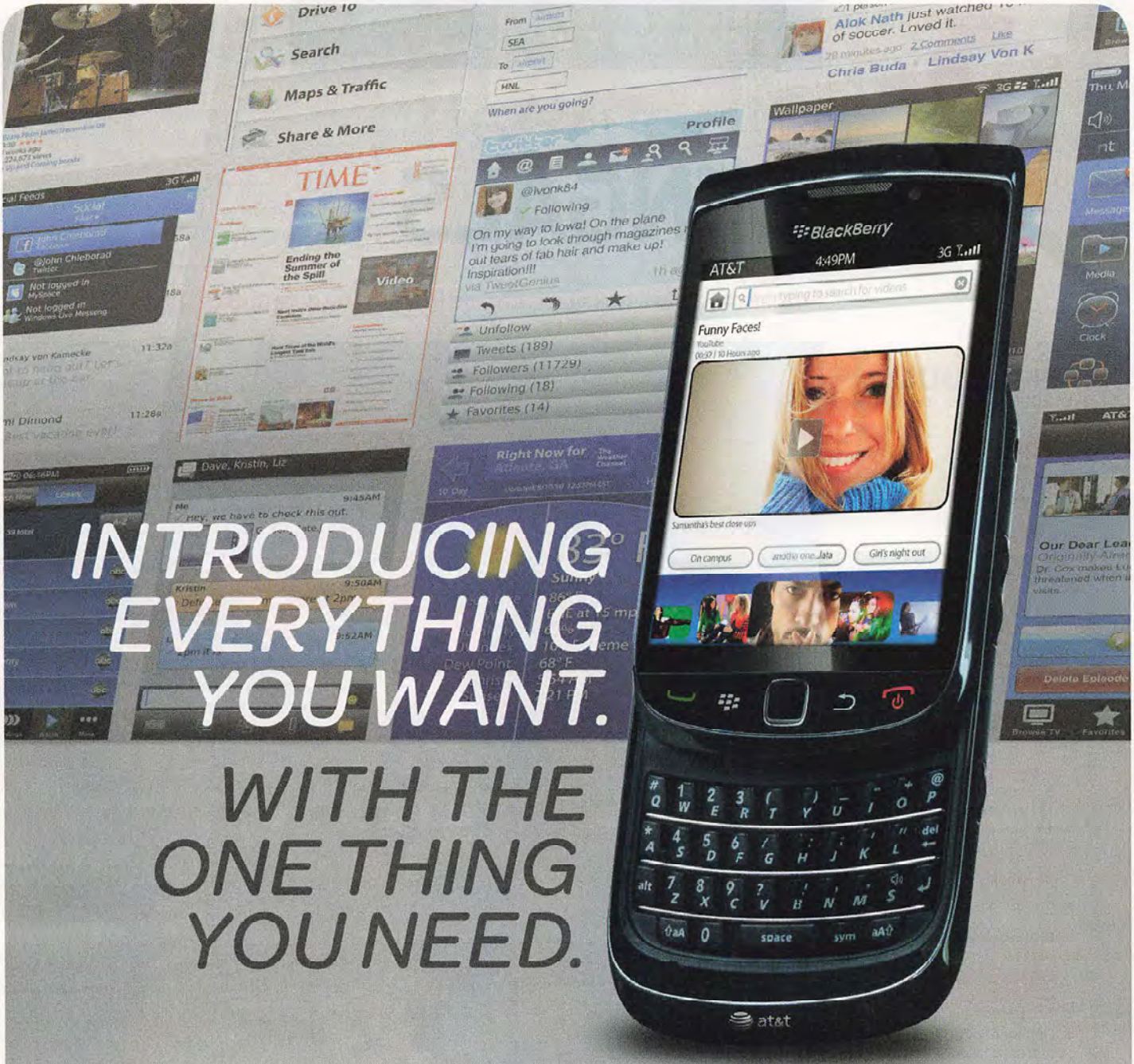
DE	***CORY REDDING***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	20	2	0
NT	**KELLY GREGG**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	63	3	0
DT	**HALOTI NGATA**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		14	35	1½	0
LB	**JARRET JOHNSON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	50	6	2
LB	**RAY LEWIS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	134	3	0
LB	**JAMEEL McCLAIN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	30	0	0
LB	**TERRELL SUGGS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	59	4½	0
CB	**LARDARIUS WEBB**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		14	35	1	0
FS	**ED REED**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		12	50	0	3
SS	**DAWAN LANDRY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	89	0	4
CB	**FABIAN WASHINGTON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		10	37	0	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**SAM KOCH**	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		73	43.7	37.9
K	**BILLY CUNDIFF**	FG	XP	POINTS
		18–23	23–23	77
PR	**CHRIS CARR**	RET	AVG	TD
		32	8.2	0
KR	**JALEN PARMELE**	RET	AVG	TD
		9	31.4	0

New acquisition
TTD: Total touchdowns

SIMMONS



INTRODUCING EVERYTHING YOU WANT.

WITH THE ONE THING YOU NEED.

AT&T and BlackBerry® have teamed up to evolve the smartphone.
Brilliant touch screen, rich Web-browsing, predictive video search, Facebook® and Twitter™ all on a single screen. Plus, access to group texting and apps at the flick of a finger. All designed to work seamlessly with a slide-out BlackBerry keyboard.

BlackBerry Torch.

Rethink Possible℠

att.com/blackberrytorch

BlackBerry®, RIM®, Research In Motion®, SureType®, SurePress™ and related trademarks, names and logos are the property of Research In Motion Limited and are registered and/or used in the U.S. and countries around the world. Used under license from Research In Motion Limited. ©2010 AT&T Intellectual Property. Service provided by AT&T Mobility. All rights reserved. AT&T, the AT&T logo, and all other marks contained herein are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property and/or AT&T affiliated companies. All other marks contained herein are the property of their respective owners. Screen images simulated.

3 Cincinnati BENGALS

Forget the arrival of T.O.—is Carson Palmer the quarterback he used to be?

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 10–6

September
12 at New England
19 Baltimore
26 at Carolina

October
3 at Cleveland
10 Tampa Bay
17 BYE
24 at Atlanta
31 Miami

November
8 Pittsburgh (M)
14 at Indianapolis
21 Buffalo
25 at N.Y. Jets (T)

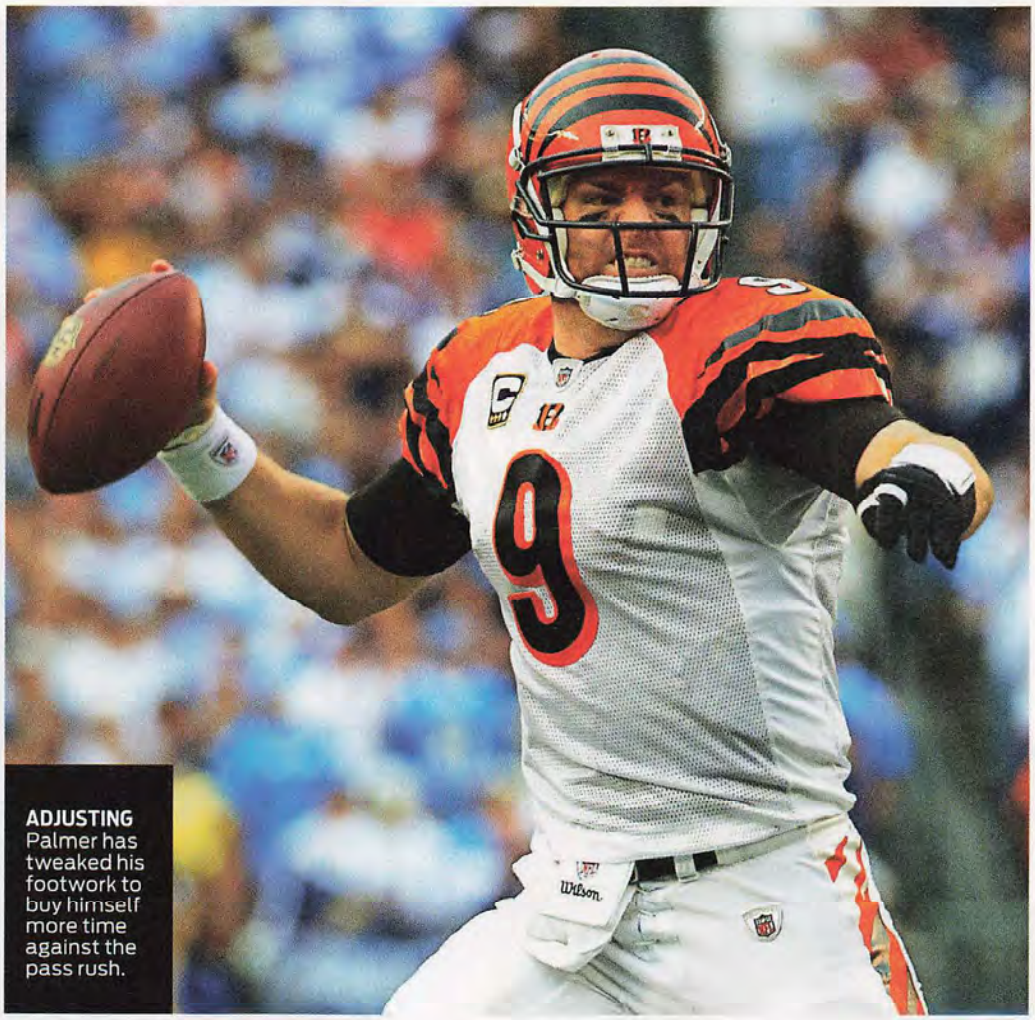
December
5 New Orleans
12 at Pittsburgh
19 Cleveland
26 San Diego

January
2 at Baltimore

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **4**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.539**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The Bengals pay the price for winning their division for just the second time in 18 years, drawing first-place opponents in the Pats, Colts and Chargers. Thanksgiving Day offers a chance for revenge against the Jets, who beat them twice in a row at the end of 2009. One edge Cincinnati does have: late-season home games against warm-weather powers New Orleans and San Diego.



ADJUSTING Palmer has tweaked his footwork to buy himself more time against the pass rush.

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

THE BENGALS went 6–0 in the AFC North to win the division last year but still had one glaring need to fill in the off-season: competent targets for quarterback Carson Palmer. Through free agency Cincinnati signed a couple of accomplished but moody receivers—Antonio Bryant (last with the Bucs, since cut) and Terrell Owens (the Bills). Through the draft Cincy plucked Oklahoma's Jermaine Gresham, the best tight end that coach Marvin Lewis has scouted in his eight-year Bengals tenure, and Jordan Shipley of Texas, the most accomplished slot receiver in NCAA history. Mission accomplished. The offense, then, should be in good shape—assuming Carson Palmer is still Carson Palmer.

He certainly didn't look like a franchise quarterback in the last two games of 2009. A career 63.2% passer, he completed just 40.4% of his throws in a pair of losses to the Jets, one to end the regular season and another in a wild-card playoff game. The arctic conditions in the Meadowlands might have contributed to the first defeat, but Palmer created his own cold streak at Paul Brown Stadium six days later, when he appeared to be on a different planet from his receivers. So while curious Bengals fans flocked to training camp this summer to look at new faces like Owens and troubled cornerback Pacman Jones, most eyes should have

been riveted on the 30-year-old quarterback. Because if he's not right, all the weapons in the world won't propel the Bengals past this season's wild-card round.

"I've watched that playoff game over and over," Palmer said during camp. "There's a bunch of plays I wish I could have back—four throws I wish I could have back. I was hurrying my feet. We could have had a big gain on one play and I hurried, and I threw it over [Chad Ochocinco's] head. That's on me. But I can either say, 'Woe is me,' or I can figure out what I need to do to play better."

Palmer spent considerable time this off-season fixing his footwork. In the past Palmer has drifted back with the snap, surveyed his receivers and then moved his feet in the direction he planned to throw. This season, when he plans to throw to the left, he's not going to take as long to point his feet toward his intended receiver, thus saving time against defenses such as those of Baltimore and Pittsburgh that specialize in forcing QBs to rush their throws.

Of course, come midseason Palmer may not be as worried about mechanics as he is about ball distribution. Needy receivers Ochocinco and Owens are likely to be chirping if they don't get enough touches, and the Bengals didn't draft Gresham and Shipley to sit on the bench. The 6' 5", 261-pound Gresham is, quite simply, a wide receiver playing tight end. And Lewis was worried in camp about making sure the Bengals gave Shipley enough snaps so that he'd become the slot receiver Palmer has not had in his six seasons as Cincy's starter.

Keeping the receivers happy is further complicated by the Bengals' transition to a more run-oriented offense. Behind workhorse back Cedric Benson, Cincinnati rushed the ball on 50% of its offensive snaps last year—an increase from 42% over the previous two seasons—and offensive coordinator Bob Bratkowski says that balance won't change much in 2010, despite the additions to the passing game.

"There's definitely potential for problems," Palmer said concerning ball distribution. "But we saw what wins in the AFC North last year. What wins is running for 120 yards or more every week in the division. We are a running football team."

Palmer had a good summer throwing the ball—"Carson looks absolutely fantastic," Ochocinco said early in camp—and because of all the attention to the newcomers, he was able to work on his adjustments in peace. What Lewis admires in Palmer is his ability to shrug off adversity. The coach is confident that his QB can put out the wildfires sure to come in the passing game this year. Palmer agrees.

"I believe that if any quarterback can deal with the kind of issues we might have, it's me," Palmer says. "There will be some arguments, but they'll be out of passion. And I've been around for a while. I'll handle them."

He'd better. The most anticipated Bengals season in years will depend on Palmer's steady hand on the field and in the locker room. —P.K.

SPOTLIGHT

Adam Jones, Cornerback

AS MARVIN LEWIS visited U.S. military installations overseas this summer, he got daily reminders of his job back home: text messages from Adam (Pacman) Jones assuring Lewis that he was getting his work in, even on Fourth of July weekend.

The Bengals have one of the best cornerback tandems in football in former first-round picks Leon Hall and Johnathan Joseph. Jones, who has had more arrests (six) than NFL seasons (this will be his fourth; he's missed most of two because of suspensions), was brought in to play the nickel and will likely be responsible for the slot receiver against three- and four-receiver sets. Jones is an accomplished cover man, and if his mind is right and he stays out of trouble, he could be the best third corner in the game. But that's a big if. "This chance is so important," he says. "I don't run with the crowd I used to. I know I'm under the microscope, but it's a different me. I'm excited."



So far Jones, 26, has avoided pitfalls. He says that several times during the off-season his car was trailed by police, and once, he says, cops checked his license plate to see if the car he was driving was stolen. In the past those kinds of things would have caused him to go ballistic. "Now," Jones says, "I know I can't do that. I realize I can't afford to make a mistake, and I'm not going to. I'm going to prove I can finally be the player I was drafted to be."

Look for Jones and nickel safety Gibril Wilson to give Cincy the secondary depth it lacked last year. The Bengals face Ben Roethlisberger and Joe Flacco four times; backup DBs can play 30 snaps a game. Jones might not start, but he'll be invaluable against spread passing games. If he can stay on the field.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MARVIN LEWIS**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 24

QB CARSON PALMER

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	466	282	60.5
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
3,094	21	13	83.6

RB CEDRIC BENSON

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
13	301	1,251	4.2
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
17	111	6.5	6

FB FUI VAKAPUNA

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
0	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
0	0	—	0

WR CHAD OCHOCINCO

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	72	1,047	9

WR *TERRELL OWENS*

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	55	829	6

TE REGGIE KELLY*

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	31	207	0

LT ANDREW WHITWORTH

G	HT	WT
16	6' 7"	335

LG NATE LIVINGS

G	HT	WT
14	6' 5"	332

C KYLE COOK

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	316

RG BOBBIE WILLIAMS

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	345

RT DENNIS ROLAND

G	HT	WT
16	6' 9"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 4

DE ROBERT GEATHERS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	36	3½	0

DT DOMATA PEKO

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	23	0	0

DT TANK JOHNSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	29	2	0

DE ANTWAN ODOM

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
6	19	8	0

LB KEITH RIVERS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	71	1	1

LB DHANI JONES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	113	3½	0

LB REY MAUALUGA

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	59	1	0

CB JOHNATHAN JOSEPH

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	68	0	6

FS CHRIS CROCKER

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	51	0	2

SS ROY WILLIAMS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
4	26	0	0

CB LEON HALL

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	65	0	6

SPECIAL TEAMS

P KEVIN HUBER

PUNTS	AVG	NET
86	43.2	36.3

K *MIKE NUGENT*

FG	XP	POINTS
4–8	14–14	26

PR QUAN COSBY

RET	AVG	TD
53	13.5	0

KR BERNARD SCOTT

RET	AVG	TD
16	31.5	1

New acquisition
** 2008 Stats*
TTD: Total touchdowns

JASON POHUSKI/CAL SPORT MEDIA

4 Cleveland BROWNS

The Holmgren era begins with some housecleaning and a healthy dose of hope

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 5–11

September
12 at Tampa Bay
19 Kansas City
26 at Baltimore

October
3 Cincinnati
10 Atlanta
17 at Pittsburgh
24 at New Orleans
31 BYE

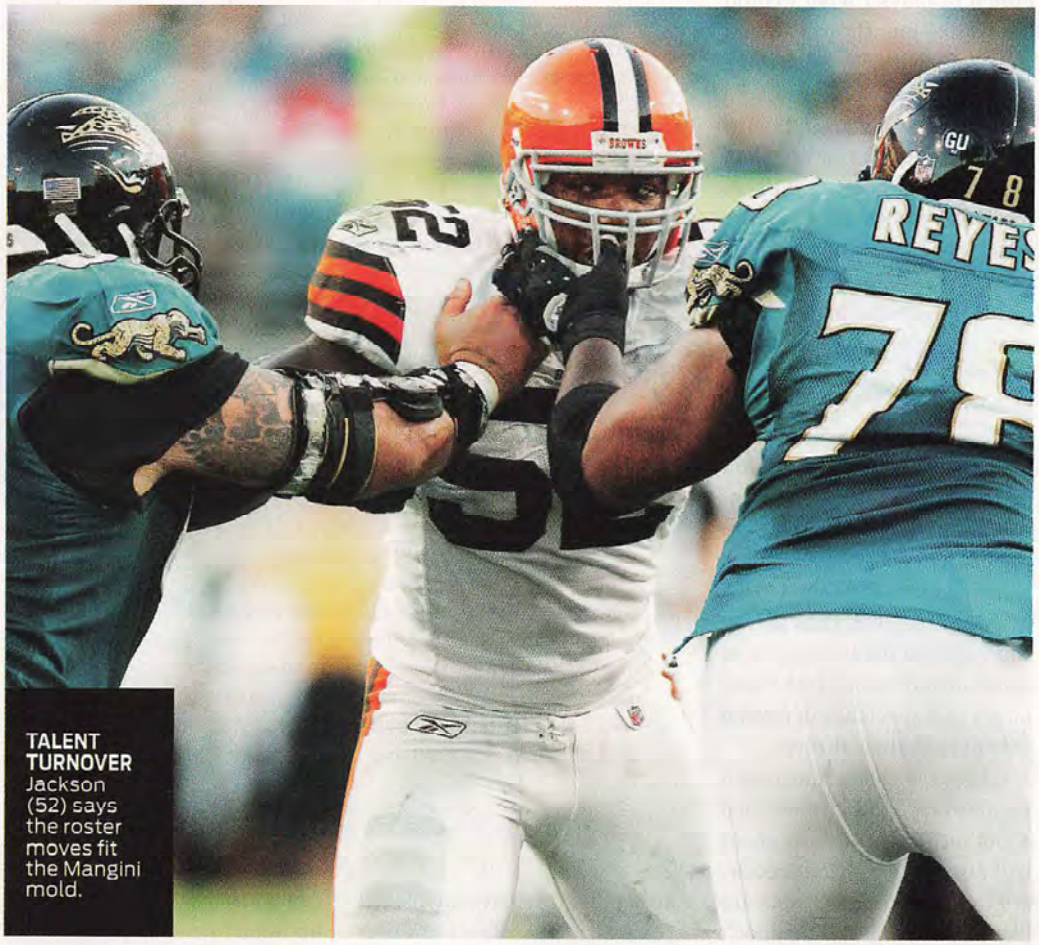
November
7 New England
14 N.Y. Jets
21 at Jacksonville
28 Carolina

December
5 at Miami
12 at Buffalo
19 at Cincinnati
26 Baltimore

January
2 Pittsburgh

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T10**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.516**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The Browns start with two of their easiest opponents—and they'd better beat at least one, because things get hairy after that: Cleveland, which has big questions about how it will move the ball, takes on five of the top eight defenses from 2009, including three of them twice. If Ben Roethlisberger's suspension drops from six games to four, the Browns will face the Steelers' quarterback in his 2010 debut.



TALENT TURNOVER Jackson (52) says the roster moves fit the Mangini mold.

MIKE HOLMGREN spent his year away from football like many sixtysomethings. He doted on his grandchildren, caught up on reading and indulged in a favorite pastime—in Holmgren's case, riding his Harley. When Browns owner Randy Lerner offered him a job last December as team president, Holmgren knew that if he accepted, the rhythms of his life would change. He consulted Bill Parcells, Bill Polian and John Madden, a triumvirate of NFL lifers who had aged gracefully in different jobs, and most important, he talked with his wife, Kathy, who gave him her blessing. Says Holmgren, 62, of the task of resurrecting the Browns, "I call it the last great adventure."

Many in northeast Ohio were amazed that the adventure did not begin with a change of coach, possibly even with Holmgren—who spent 17 seasons as the head man in Green Bay and Seattle—naming himself to the post. But over two days of winter meetings with the incumbent, Eric Mangini, Holmgren chose to keep him on, though Mangini won't be responsible for personnel decisions as he had been. "I made a promise to myself to give him a chance and not really listen to anybody else," Holmgren says. "It doesn't take long to know he's very bright, he cares, he's a hardworking guy. I just had to get him to smile a little more."

Clevelanders have reason to believe happier days are ahead. Mangini survived a 1–11 start, marked by grumbling from players about his coaching tactics, to close out 2009 on a four-game winning streak, including a vic-

STEVE JACOBSON

tory over the hated Steelers. In that last month of the season the Browns seemed to have bought into Mangini's mantras about the core characteristics of a successful player (smart, tough, hardworking, competitive, selfless, a guy to whom football is important) and the core values of a successful team (communication, focus, finish, trust). Once they started winning, nobody questioned the coach's lengthy practices or his fines for parking in the wrong space. "Everybody wants progress, but nobody likes change," Mangini says. "It is uncomfortable. We changed a ton of stuff, the way things are done. I think a lot of people get it now. They've grown as a group, and I went through growth."

Says Browns linebacker David Bowens, who also played under Mangini with the Jets, "This year everyone knows what they're supposed to do, how Eric is going to treat everybody, and it's allowing us to relax a lot more."

While they kept the coach, Holmgren and general manager Tom Heckert made some big off-season personnel moves, acquiring veterans (linebackers Scott Fujita and Chris Gocong, cornerback Sheldon Brown) and shedding many holdovers from the previous regime (quarterbacks Derek Anderson and Brady Quinn, running back Jamal Lewis). "Last year's team was a combination of Romeo [Crennel's] guys and [Mangini's] guys," says linebacker D'Qwell Jackson. "This year we have a better fit of his style of player."

With new quarterback Jake Delhomme needing to find chemistry with young skill position players, the Browns will likely be looking up at Pittsburgh, Baltimore and Cincy for a while longer in the demanding AFC North. Still, there's a sense in the locker room that Cleveland weathered a dark period and is headed for a turnaround. The person who might face the biggest challenge of all this season is Holmgren, who'll be watching games from a suite instead of his customary place on the sideline.

"When the game was going a certain way, I always felt I could fix it," he says. "I'm not tweaking anything anymore. Someone else is. I have to do what I do for the organization to get it going, and [Mangini] is coaching. I promised him, 'My door will always be open for you, but I'm not going to come running into your office pounding on the table.' "

Mangini appears comfortable with the relationship and happy to have an experienced sounding board on coaching matters. "When I sit down with him," Mangini says, "I'm not talking to someone who hasn't been through the whole range of problems."

It will be an interesting marriage, the elder Holmgren adjusting to his new role as president, the young lion Mangini, 23 years his junior, still finding his voice. The president's role might be new, but the nameplate on his golf cart during training camp looked familiar: COACH HOLMGREN. —*Damon Hack*

FRED VUICH

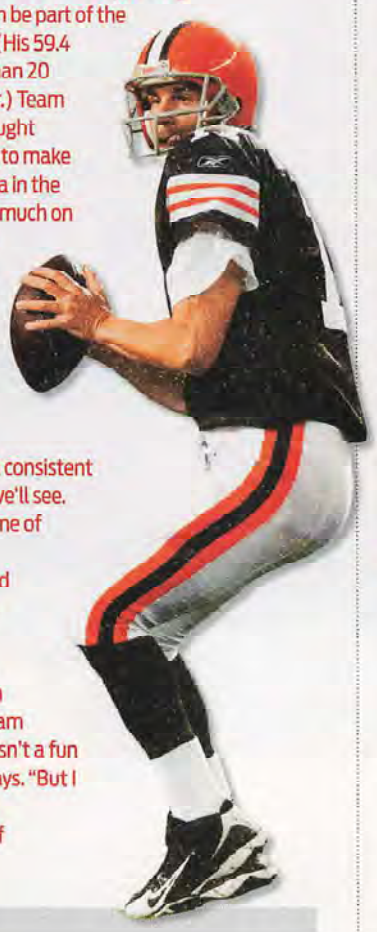
SPOTLIGHT

Jake Delhomme, Quarterback

AFTER THE Panthers released Delhomme following his eight-touchdown, 18-interception season in 2009, he briefly considered signing with the Saints to back up Drew Brees this year. Delhomme began his NFL career in New Orleans, not far from Breaux Bridge, La., where he was born. That move would have allowed him "to start to make my way back home," Delhomme says. Ultimately, though, the prospect of starting at quarterback for a team starting over was more appealing.

The Browns believe Delhomme can be part of the solution despite his recent struggles. (His 59.4 passer rating last season was more than 20 points off his previous low as a starter.) Team president Mike Holmgren says he thought Delhomme spent part of 2009 trying to make up for his six turnovers against Arizona in the playoffs the previous year. "He put so much on his shoulders," Holmgren says. "First game of the year, the ball is tipped, interception, all of a sudden fans are booing. It kind of blew his mind. Once we talked that through, [signing Delhomme] wasn't a hard decision. He has brought this team together." Adds coach Eric Mangini, "He's been a consistent performer, and I believe that's what we'll see. There are a lot of asterisks next to some of those [interceptions]."

Delhomme has looked rejuvenated with his new squad. In his first three exhibition games, he completed 38 of 48 passes for 345 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions, an impressive start for a player and a team looking for good news. "Last year wasn't a fun year football wise," Delhomme, 35, says. "But I still love the game. I want to be part of a winner again. I want to be part of turning it around."



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **ERIC MANGINI**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 32

QB	***JAKE DELHOMME***				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	11	321	178	55.5	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	2,015	8	18	59.4	
RB	**JEROME HARRISON**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	14	194	862	4.4	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	34	220	6.5	7	
FB	**LAWRENCE VICKERS**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	0	0	—	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	8	27	3.4	1	
WR	**MOHAMED MASSAQUOI**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	34	624	3	
WR	**BRIAN ROBISKIE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	11	7	106	0	
TE	***BENJAMIN WATSON***				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	29	404	5	
LT	**JOE THOMAS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 6"	312		
LG	**ERIC STEINBACH**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 6"	295		
C	**ALEX MACK**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 4"	311		
RG	**FLOYD WOMACK**				
	G	HT	WT		
	13	6' 4"	328		
RT	***TONY PASHOS***				
	G	HT	WT		
	5	6' 6"	326		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 31

DE	**KENYON COLEMAN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	13	38	1½	0
NT	**SHAUN ROGERS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	11	36	2	0
DE	**ROBAIRE SMITH**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	62	1½	0
LB	**MATT ROTH**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	10	32	4	0
LB	***CHRIS GOCONG***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	44	1	0
LB	**D'QWELL JACKSON**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	6	59	0	0
LB	***SCOTT FUJITA***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	11	58	1	0
CB	**ERIC WRIGHT**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	65	0	4
FS	**ABRAM ELAM**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	91	1	0
SS	***T.J. WARD (R)***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	8	68	0	1
CB	***SHELDON BROWN***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	51	0	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**DAVE ZASTUDIL**		
	PUNTS	AVG	NET
	49	44.7	39.1
K	**PHIL DAWSON**		
	FG	XP	POINTS
	17-19	19-19	69
PR	**JOSHUA CRIBBS**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	38	11.9	1
KR	**JOSHUA CRIBBS**		
	RET	AVG	TD
	56	27.5	3

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

THE ALL-NEW RAM HEAVY DUTY.
MOTOR TREND'S 2010 TRUCK OF THE YEAR.®

MULTIMILLION-DOLLAR ATHLETES DON'T ALWAYS TRAVEL ON PRIVATE JETS.

RAMTRUCKS.COM

RAM











Cummins is a registered trademark of Cummins, Inc.

1 Indianapolis COLTS

The quiet professionals are back for another run at the AFC crown

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 14–2

September
12 at Houston
19 N.Y. Giants
26 at Denver

October
3 at Jacksonville
10 Kansas City
17 at Washington
24 BYE
31 Houston (M)

November
7 at Philadelphia
14 Cincinnati
21 at New England
28 San Diego

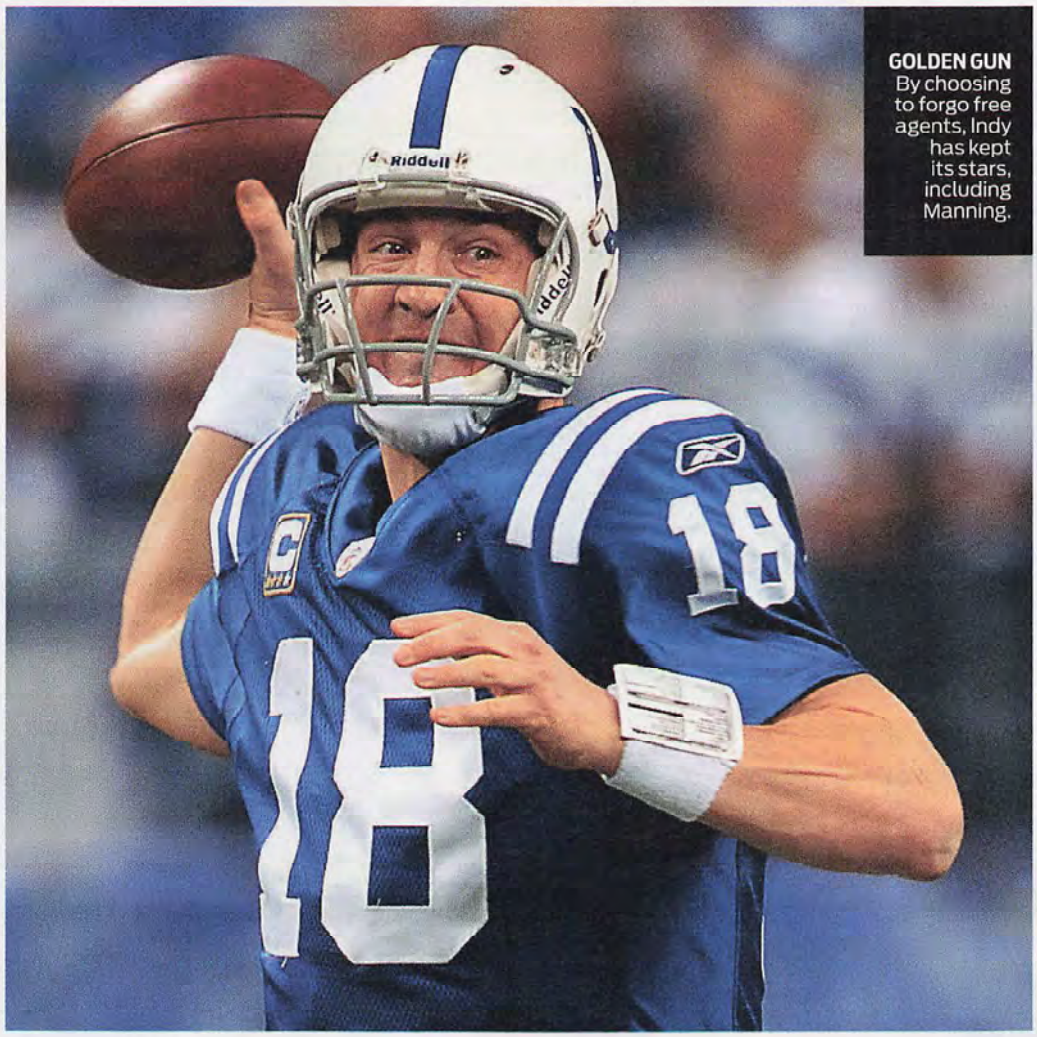
December
5 Dallas
9 at Tennessee (M)
19 Jacksonville
26 at Oakland

January
2 Tennessee

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **11**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.516**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
The Colts are set up for one of their patented runs to start the season: Indianapolis doesn't face a 2009 playoff team until Week 9. Then, however, it gets five of them in a row. The league just loves that marquee Pats-Colts game in November. This is the sixth straight year for such a midseason showdown; Indianapolis has won four of the previous five.



GOLDEN GUN By choosing to forgo free agents, Indy has kept its stars, including Manning.

AL TIELEMANS

IF THE Colts were a publicly traded company, they'd pace the S&P 500. For most of the last decade they have been the gold standard in the NFL, winning at least 12 games in each of the past seven seasons. But while Indianapolis's 31–17 loss to the Saints in Super Bowl XLIV last February might be viewed as a sign that its bubble is about to burst—of the previous nine Super Bowl losers, six failed to reach the postseason the following year, and six finished under .500—nobody at training camp in Anderson, Ind., seemed to be panicking, a phenomenon that can be explained by the Colts' corporate culture. Asked to explain the team's low-key professionalism, second-year coach Jim Caldwell sounds like someone who's been studying the lingo of middle management: "We're pretty good at compartmentalizing." He'll be asking for TPS reports from his assistants next.

Everything starts at the top in Indy with team president Bill Polian, who built the Bills into a minidynasty as general manager in the early 1990s. Buffalo made it to each Super Bowl from '91 through '94 (losing all four), in part because Polian was able to keep the nucleus of his team—including stars such as quarterback Jim Kelly, wideout Andre Reed and defensive end Bruce Smith—

intact, a benefit of building the team through the draft instead of with flashy acquisitions on the free-agent market.

Polian's approach has been much the same in Indianapolis, which is why the roster remains mostly untouched from a year ago. The Colts' biggest off-season move was re-signing eighth-year middle linebacker Gary Brackett, a fast and heady leader on the field, to a five-year, $33 million deal hours after he hit the free-agent market in March. They will likely lose Jeff Saturday for at least one game while the two-time All-Pro center rebounds from off-season knee surgery, but they get back All-Pro safety Bob Sanders and fourth-year wideout Anthony Gonzalez, who missed a combined 29 games a year ago, as well as the entire postseason. Both the offense and defense performed well in their absence—the Colts allowed the third-fewest yards per pass attempt (6.23) and threw for the second-most yards per game (282.2)—but they gain enviable flexibility and depth with their return.

Indy is now grappling with how best to reintegrate Gonzalez, a speedy and cerebral receiver, who had to watch from the bench as Pierre Garçon and Austin Collie, both 24, combined for 1,441 yards and 11 touchdowns last season. With those three targets and a pair of All-Pros in wideout Reggie Wayne and tight end Dallas Clark, the Colts—whose 601 pass attempts ranked second in the league last year—will remain deadly through the air. "People say that [ball distribution] is a problem, but it's a good situation," says Gonzalez, who insists he is 100% after undergoing surgery last November to clear loose particles out of his right knee. "Now we have so many guys with experience starting in big games. There shouldn't be any wide eyes."

A year after naming quarterbacks coach Caldwell to replace the retiring Tony Dungy, Indy has tapped two more company men to succeed retiring offensive line coach Howard Mudd and offensive coordinator Tom Moore (who is stepping down to a less-time-consuming role as the team's senior offensive assistant). Offensive quality control guru Pete Metzelaars will coach the line, and eighth-year assistant Clyde Christensen will call the plays. "Howard allowed Pete to run a lot of the meetings the last few years, and Clyde organized a lot of our red zone and third-down packages," Caldwell says. "Systemwise, we haven't changed, so that adds a lot of continuity in itself."

The Colts' most glaring weakness remains their ground game. Last season they finished last in rushing (80.9 yards per game), but that's largely because they also had the second fewest attempts (22.9 per game). Nevertheless, Indy has set the audacious goal of improving last year's 3.5-yard rushing average by at least one yard per carry. A more selfish feature back would certainly chafe at the limited workload, but fifth-year vet Joseph Addai accepts his place in the Indianapolis org chart. "When you have a quarterback like Peyton Manning, you want him to throw the ball," says Addai. "You could argue that he's the best quarterback to ever play."

As long as Polian keeps talent in-house, with Manning under center, the Colts will be recession-proof.

—Andrew Lawrence



ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

SPOTLIGHT

Bob Sanders, Strong safety

THE QUESTION that looms over Sanders is always the same. "Will he stay healthy?" wonders Colts president Bill Polian. "The odds tell you he's probably going to miss some time." Through six NFL seasons the closest the two-time All-Pro has come to playing a full schedule was in 2007, when he started 15 games, earned NFL Defensive Player of the Year honors and helped Indy win Super Bowl XLI. But the two years since have seen Sanders sidelined for 24 games with a litany of ailments, including a high ankle sprain and a knee that required off-season arthroscopic surgery in '08. He tried to play through both injuries but lasted just two games before returning to the injured list with a torn biceps tendon.

Sanders compensates for his lack of size (he's listed at 5' 8" and 206 pounds) by playing the game with reckless abandon, leaving him more susceptible to getting hurt. The Colts have learned to make do without him so far. Fourth-year man Melvin Bullitt had a career-high 77 tackles in 2009 while playing alongside Antoine Bethea, who finished third on the team in that department (95). Bethea also picked off four passes and forced two fumbles, emerging as a defensive playmaker in his fourth season.

With Sanders back, the Colts can deploy all three safeties when they go into their nickel package. At which point a different question might be asked of Sanders: Can he keep up?

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JIM CALDWELL**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 9

QB	**PEYTON MANNING**				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	16	571	393	68.8	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	4,500	33	16	99.9	
RB	**JOSEPH ADDAI**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	15	219	828	3.8	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	51	336	6.6	13	
WR	**REGGIE WAYNE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	100	1,264	10	
WR	**PIERRE GARÇON**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	14	47	765	4	
WR	**AUSTIN COLLIE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	60	676	7	
TE	**DALLAS CLARK**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	100	1,106	10	
LT	**CHARLIE JOHNSON**				
	G	HT	WT		
	12	6' 4"	305		
LG	**MIKE POLLAK**				
	G	HT	WT		
	14	6' 3"	301		
C	**JEFF SATURDAY**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 2"	295		
RG	**KYLE DEVAN**				
	G	HT	WT		
	15	6' 2"	306		
RT	**RYAN DIEM**				
	G	HT	WT		
	15	6' 6"	320		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 18th

DE	**ROBERT MATHIS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	37	9½	0
DT	**ANTONIO JOHNSON**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	34	1	0
DT	**DANIEL MUIR**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	52	½	0
DE	**DWIGHT FREENEY**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	24	13½	0
LB	**CLINT SESSIONS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	103	½	2
LB	**GARY BRACKETT**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	99	1	1
LB	**PHILIP WHEELER**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	61	1	0
CB	**KELVIN HAYDEN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	9	50	0	1
FS	**ANTOINE BETHEA**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	95	0	4
SS	**BOB SANDERS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	2	3	0	1
CB	**JERRAUD POWERS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	12	65	0	1

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**PAT McAFEE**			
	PUNTS	AVG	NET	
	64	44.3	37.8	
K	**ADAM VINATIERI**			
	FG	XP	POINTS	
	7–9	17–18	38	
PR	***BRANDON JAMES (R)***			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	44	5.5	0	
KR	**SAM GIGUERE**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	5	24.4	0	

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 Houston TEXANS

This team has talent, but does it have toughness? If so, the playoffs are in reach

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 9–7

September
12 Indianapolis
19 at Washington
26 Dallas

October
3 at Oakland
10 N.Y. Giants
17 Kansas City
24 BYE

November
1 at Indianapolis (M)
7 San Diego
14 at Jacksonville
21 at N.Y. Jets
28 Tennessee

December
2 at Philadelphia (T)
13 Baltimore (M)
19 at Tennessee
26 at Denver

January
2 Jacksonville

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T1**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.547**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The Texans open with the Colts, whom they've beaten only once in 16 tries, and then get three NFC East teams in their next four dates. The end of the schedule is almost as rough; Houston's on the road for three of its last five. There just aren't many easy matchups for a franchise still seeking its first playoff appearance.



HAND OFF The inability of Slaton (20) to hold on to the ball gives Foster the edge to start.

GREG NELSON

ON PAPER the Texans would seem to have the makings of a Super Bowl contender. Prolific passer Matt Schaub and gifted wide receiver Andre Johnson trigger one of the NFL's most explosive offenses. A trio of first-round draft picks—end Mario Williams (first overall in 2006), tackle Amobi Okoye (10th, '07) and linebacker Brian Cushing (15th, '09)—propel a defense on the rise. Electric returner Jacoby Jones and a stout punt coverage unit anchor one of the league's steadier special teams units.

But the surplus of talent belies the lack of a killer instinct. Mental mistakes proved to be Houston's undoing on more than a few occasions last season in which the team lost six games by eight points or fewer. (What's worse, the Texans were either tied or had the lead in the second half in all but one of those losses.) The depth of the team's errors was on full display in a key Week 12 home matchup against Indianapolis. After jumping out to a 17–0 lead, Houston got burned for a pick-six and fumbled in the last nine minutes of the game on the way to a 35–27 loss.

The defeat was just one of five in the AFC South that kept the Texans from claiming the first postseason berth in franchise history. (They did finish above .500 for the first time, at 9–7.) "It's hard to get to the playoffs when you're 1–5 in your own division," says Pro Bowl tight end Owen Daniels, who is slowly returning to the offense after suffering a season-ending right ACL tear in Week 8.

It's even harder to win games with a running back who fum-

bles as consistently as Steve Slaton. While not yet on the level of former Houston quarterback David Carr (who fumbled a franchise-record 21 times in 2002), Slaton's seven cough-ups in '09 were still the most by a nonquarterback in team history.

The main culprit for Slaton's poor ballhandling was a pinched nerve in his neck that worsened with the punishment he absorbed in practices and games. "Week in and week out I would just get weaker in my right arm," says Slaton, adding that the pain grew so severe that he could barely turn a doorknob or pick up his kids. "It just reached a point where I wasn't strong enough to hold anything."

The Texans shut him down with five games to go, and in January he underwent cervical fusion surgery, a procedure that relieved pressure on the nerve. In the interim, he watched his grip on the starting job slip. Leading the race to replace him is 6' 1", 229-pound Arian Foster, a physical second-year back out of Tennessee whose hunger to succeed befits his status as an undrafted free agent. Last season Foster went from toiling on the practice squad to playing special teams to rushing for a game-high 119 yards and two touchdowns in a season-ending win over New England.

"One of the things that's stuck with me is when Coach [Gary] Kubiak said, 'It doesn't matter if you're Brian [Cushing] or a guy that's undrafted—if you can play in this league, we'll find a way to get you on the field,' " recalls Foster. "That stuck with me. Ever since that day I felt like I belonged."

Foster figures to be deeply involved in the Texans' offense this fall after the loss of rookie Ben Tate, who suffered season-ending ankle and fibula injuries in the Texans' preseason opener. (Tate, a second-round selection out of Auburn, was vying with Foster and Slaton for carries.)

And the offense will have to be even better than it was in 2009 to make up for the loss of Cushing, the Defensive Rookie of the Year who was suspended for the first four games of the season after testing positive for a performance-enhancing substance. His explanations for the positive test ranged from overtraining to the presence of a tumor.

Without Cushing, the Texans would seem to have lost the one thing that they didn't have in abundant supply—toughness. But safety Bernard Pollard has a warning for opponents expecting a drop-off in intensity in Cushing's absence. "We're letting receivers know that if you come across the middle, you're gonna get hit," says Pollard, who won't shy from testing the rules to make his point. "You know what? I'll be the first one to take the fine. I'll write it off. We have to establish that fear."

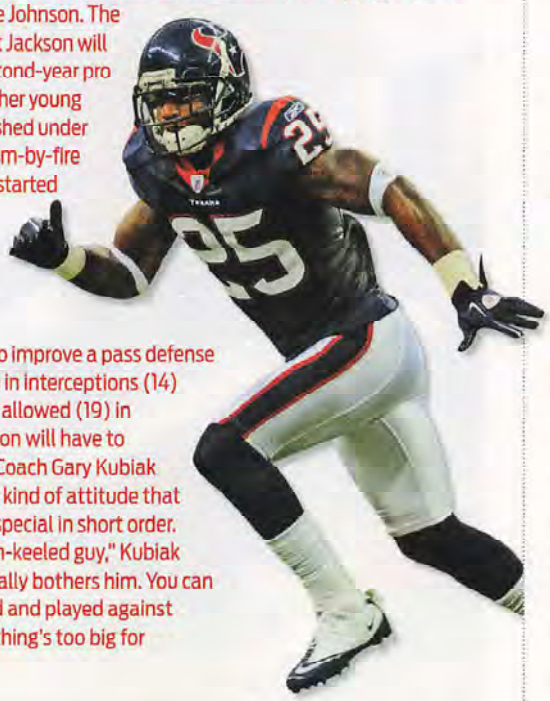
That killer mentality, and a bit more focus, could transform the Texans from paper champs to playoff contenders. —A.L.

SPOTLIGHT

Kareem Jackson, Cornerback

IF THERE'S a personnel piece that's missing from Houston's playoff puzzle, it's a top-flight cornerback. The Texans had one in seven-year vet Dunta Robinson, who wanted more money than the Texans were willing to pay so they let him walk to the Falcons in the off-season. Now Houston believes it may have found another one in Jackson, a first-rounder out of Alabama who is practically a Robinson facsimile. Like Robinson, Jackson has decent size (5' 10", 197 pounds) and athleticism and is exceptionally instinctive. But also like Robinson, durability is an issue with Jackson, as is his habit of gambling for interceptions.

However, what is not at issue is Jackson's ability to grasp the Texans' defensive scheme, which resembles the system the Crimson Tide ran under former NFL coach Nick Saban. To help Jackson make the transition to the increased speed of the pro game, Houston coaches put Jackson against the first teamers in practice, where he took his lumps against All-Pro receiver Andre Johnson. The staff expects that Jackson will start opposite second-year pro Glover Quin, another young player who flourished under the team's baptism-by-fire philosophy. Quin started 12 games as a rookie and led the Texans with 11 passes defended.



If Houston is to improve a pass defense that ranked 20th in interceptions (14) and touchdowns allowed (19) in 2009, then Jackson will have to settle in quickly. Coach Gary Kubiak thinks he has the kind of attitude that could make him special in short order. "He's just an even-keeled guy," Kubiak says. "Nothing really bothers him. You can tell he's practiced and played against good people. Nothing's too big for him right now."

GREG NELSON

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **GARY KUBIAK**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 4

QB	**MATT SCHAUB**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		16	583	396	67.9
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		4,770	29	15	98.6
RB	**ARIAN FOSTER**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		6	54	257	4.8
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		8	93	11.6	3
FB	**VONTA LEACH**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		16	0	0	—
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		20	155	7.8	1
WR	**ANDRE JOHNSON**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	101	1,569	9
WR	**KEVIN WALTER**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		14	53	611	2
TE	**OWEN DANIELS**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		8	40	519	5
LT	**DUANE BROWN**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	315	
LG	**KASEY STUDDARD**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 3"	302	
C	**CHRIS MYERS**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	292	
RG	**MIKE BRISIEL**	G	HT	WT	
		5	6' 5"	296	
RT	**ERIC WINSTON**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 7"	317	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 13

DE	**ANTONIO SMITH**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	34	4½	0
DT	**SHAUN CODY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		14	21	½	0
DT	**AMOBI OKOYE**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	38	1½	0
DE	**MARIO WILLIAMS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	43	9	0
LB	**ZAC DILES**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	62	0	0
LB	**DeMECO RYANS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	123	1	0
LB	**BRIAN CUSHING**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	133	4	4
CB	**GLOVER QUIN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	68	0	0
FS	**EUGENE WILSON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		8	29	0	2
SS	**BERNARD POLLARD**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	102	1½	4
CB	***KAREEM JACKSON* (R)**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		9	27	0	1

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**MATT TURK**	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		67	42.8	39.4
K	**KRIS BROWN**	FG	XP	POINTS
		21–32	43–44	106
PR	**JACOBY JONES**	RET	AVG	TD
		39	10.9	0
KR	**ANDRE' DAVIS**	RET	AVG	TD
		33	23.7	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Tennessee TITANS

The talent is there—leadership and maturity are the pressing issues

2010 SCHEDULE

2009 Record: 8–8

September
12 Oakland
19 Pittsburgh
26 at N.Y. Giants

October
3 Denver
10 at Dallas
18 at Jacksonville (M)
24 Philadelphia
31 at San Diego

November
7 BYE
14 at Miami
21 Washington
28 at Houston

December
5 Jacksonville
9 Indianapolis (T)
19 Houston
26 at Kansas City

January
2 at Indianapolis

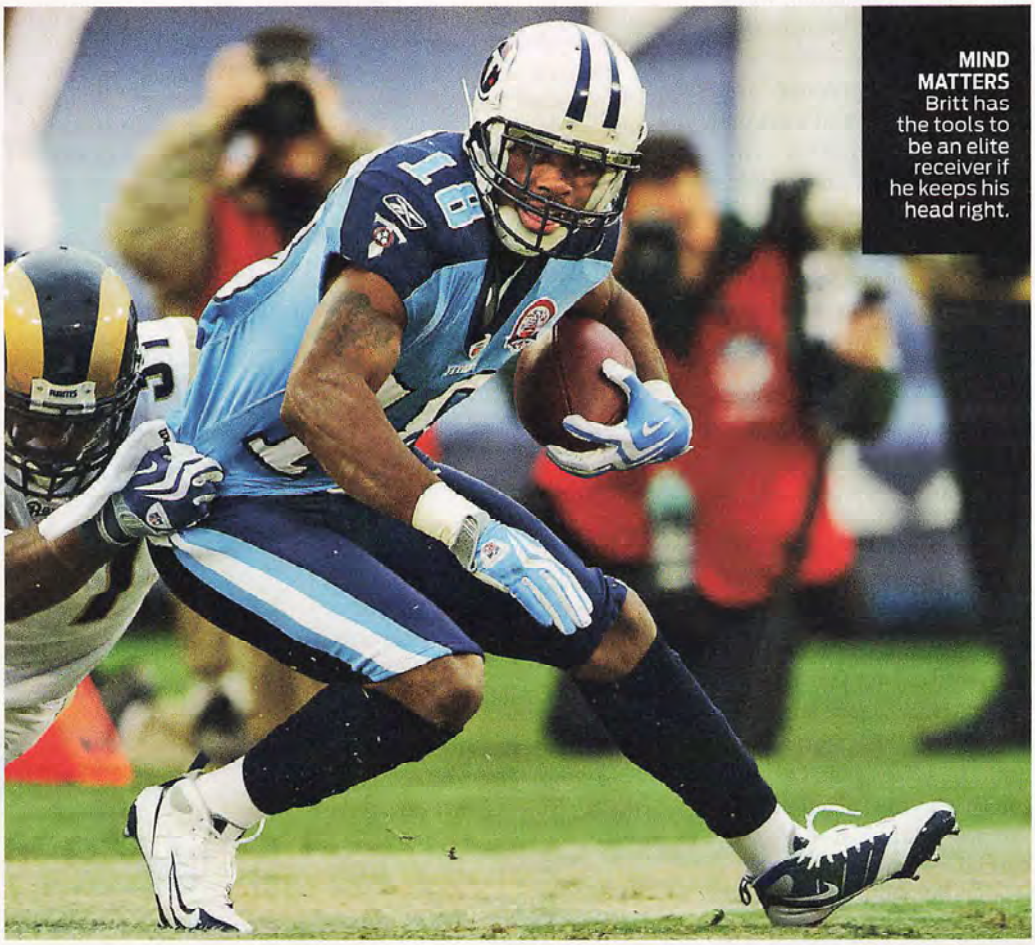
(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH

NFL Rank: **T1**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.547**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS

The Titans should avoid repeating last year's slow start—they open at home with the Raiders, then face the Roethlisbergerless Steelers—but their playoff fate will be decided by a string of five divisional opponents in the final six games. If there's a bright side to traveling to Indianapolis in Week 17, it's that the game often has been a throwaway for the Colts.



MIND MATTERS Britt has the tools to be an elite receiver if he keeps his head right.

BILL FRAKES

IN RECENT years the Titans have relied on veteran leadership. Players like linebacker Keith Bulluck, center Kevin Mawae and defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch helped stoke the team in great seasons like 2008, when Tennessee went 13–3, and steadied the squad in uneven years such as '09, in which the Titans rallied from an 0–6 start to finish 8–8.

The question for 2010 is whether Tennessee has any leaders left to lean on after an off-season during which the team's locker-room generals either left voluntarily or were discharged. After 10 years in Nashville, Bulluck signed with the Giants. Mawae, who helped pave the way for the NFL's second-ranked rushing attack in '09, was cut. And Vanden Bosch hit a four-year, $26 million jackpot with Detroit after the Titans refused to engage in a free-agent bidding war.

"People make a lot of ado about the leadership, but I'm not concerned about it," coach Jeff Fisher says. "The guys that left were great, but the guys we have here are still great."

The best of them is running back Chris Johnson, who last season set a league record by racking up 2,509 yards from scrimmage, including 2,006 rushing. After a brief contract dispute over the summer (he wanted to be the NFL's highest-paid player but settled for a $1.25 million raise and will make $4.2 million this year), Johnson returned to the team and set his sights on reaching another league milestone, this one even more difficult than last year's. "I'm shooting for 2,500 [rushing yards]," he says, "but

I'll be happy with anything over the record [of 2,105, set by Eric Dickerson]."

That was a bold statement, even more so considering that he'll have to do it behind a tweaked offensive line. With the release of Mawae, Eugene Amano slides over from guard to center and backup Leroy Harris steps into Amano's spot. But, as Fisher pointed out at the start of camp, "I'll remind you that last year at this time, when [Johnson] wanted to be the MVP and rush for over 2,000 yards, everybody kind of said, 'Oh yeah, really? We'll see what happens.' It happens."

Johnson will have a better chance of reaching 2,500 yards if Tennessee can develop a downfield passing game to prevent defenses from stacking against the run. Even though he led the Titans to an 8–2 record after returning to the starting lineup midway through 2009, quarterback Vince Young remains the object of much scrutiny. But, according to Fisher and offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger, Young was a hit in the off-season (as well as in a Dallas strip club in which he got into a minor scuffle in June), which they believe portends good things this fall for the fifth-year quarterback.

"I believe we have surrounded him with the best skill players to date that he's been on the field with," Fisher says. "That simply will help in his improvement. He has room to improve, but again I think with what he was able to accomplish this off-season, all the signs are there for him to have a great year."

One of those ascending skill players around Young is receiver Kenny Britt. After a breakout 2009 rookie season in which he led the team in receiving yards (701) and made a pinballing, game-winning catch against Arizona in Week 12 to keep Tennessee in the playoff hunt, Britt returned to Nashville for spring workouts out of shape. Hamstring and knee injuries reduced him to mostly an observer in practices. A bruised confidence contributed to dropped passes, allowing Nate Washington and Lavelle Hawkins to steal reps from Britt.

"When I'm not focused on the field, I'm gonna have some drops," says Britt. "I want to be the guy who makes his quarterback look good regardless. If he throws a bad pass, I want people saying I didn't get to it. It was my fault."

By the summer Britt was ready to challenge Washington and Justin Gage for a starting job. He rededicated himself to his fitness, with an emphasis on increasing his endurance. "A lot of times [last year] I needed an IV or a muscle relaxer just to keep going at 100 percent," he says. "What I want to do this year is start out the first game going all four quarters without stopping."

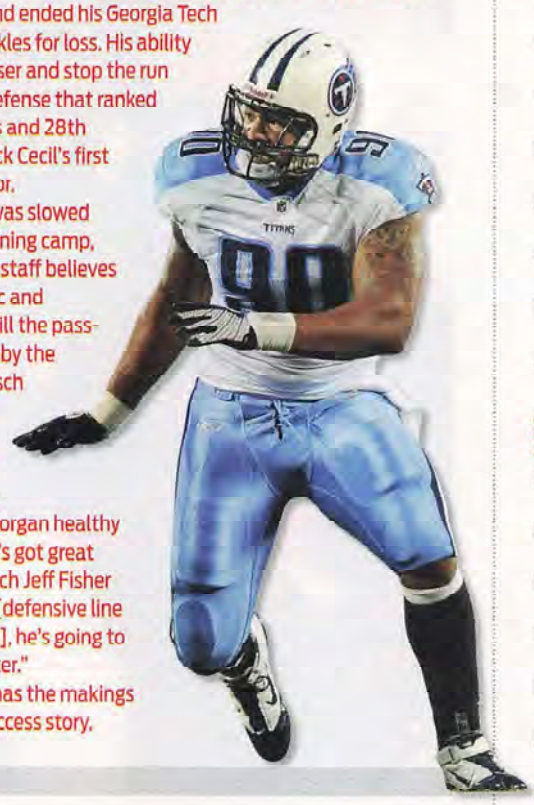
Britt is growing up, and so are many of the Titans. It's good timing because this season, they'll need to. —A.L.

SPOTLIGHT

Derrick Morgan, Defensive end

THE TITANS didn't expect Morgan to be available to them in last April's draft. An 8–8 record left them with pick No. 16, and the chances of scoring a talent like the rangy 6' 3", 278-pound defensive end at that spot seemed unlikely. But when the Eagles traded up to grab Michigan end Brandon Graham with the 13th selection and the Giants snagged South Florida's Jason Pierre-Paul two picks later, Tennessee knew it had its man.

More so than most other teams, the Titans have a knack for developing fearsome pass rushers. It doesn't matter if they're first-rounders like Jevon Kearse (whom they took 16th overall in 1999) or second-rounders like Kyle Vanden Bosch (35th overall by the Cardinals in 2001). Their latest project is Morgan, who led the ACC in sacks (12½) last season and ended his Georgia Tech career with 30½ tackles for loss. His ability to both rush the passer and stop the run instantly boosts a defense that ranked 31st against the pass and 28th overall in 2009, Chuck Cecil's first season as coordinator.



Though Morgan was slowed by a calf injury in training camp, the Titans' coaching staff believes he has the work ethic and consistency to help fill the pass-rushing void created by the losses of Vanden Bosch (whom the Lions signed in free agency) and Kearse (not re-signed). The focus is on getting Morgan healthy and on the field. "He's got great hands and feet," coach Jeff Fisher says. "Working with [defensive line coach Jim Washburn], he's going to get significantly better."

In short, Morgan has the makings of another Titans success story.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JEFF FISHER**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 12

QB	**VINCE YOUNG**				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	12	259	152	58.7	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	1,879	10	7	82.8	
RB	**CHRIS JOHNSON**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	358	2,006	5.6	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	50	503	10.1	16	
FB	**AHMARD HALL**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	1	5	5.0	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	12	79	6.6	0	
WR	**KENNY BRITT**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	42	701	3	
WR	**JUSTIN GAGE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	12	28	383	3	
TE	**BO SCAIFE**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	14	45	440	1	
LT	**MICHAEL ROOS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 7"	320		
LG	**LEROY HARRIS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	15	6' 3"	302		
C	**EUGENE AMANO**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 3"	300		
RG	**JAKE SCOTT**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 5"	292		
RT	**DAVID STEWART**				
	G	HT	WT		
	15	6' 7"	315		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 26

DE	***JASON BABIN***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	12	16	2½	0
DT	**JOVAN HAYE**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	32	½	0
DT	**JASON JONES**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	7	15	4	0
DE	**JACOB FORD**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	22	5½	0
LB	***WILL WITHERSPOON***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	11	59	1	1
LB	**STEPHEN TULLOCH**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	121	2	0
LB	**STANFORD KEGLAR**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	12	6	0	0
CB	**JASON MCCOURTY**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	29	0	0
FS	**MICHAEL GRIFFIN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	77	1	1
SS	**CHRIS HOPE**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	81	2	3
CB	**CORTLAND FINNEGAN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	13	63	0	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**BRETT KERN**			
	PUNTS	AVG	NET	
	37	45.0	41.4	
K	**ROB BIRONAS**			
	FG	XP	POINTS	
	27–32	37–37	118	
PR	**ALVIN PEARMAN**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	11	10.2	0	
KR	**KENNY BRITT**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	8	21.8	0	

New acquisition
TTD: Total touchdowns

DONNJONESPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/TITANS

4 Jacksonville JAGUARS

A local product will try to revive Florida's fan-starved franchise

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 7–9

September
12 Denver
19 at San Diego
26 Philadelphia

October
3 Indianapolis
10 at Buffalo
18 Tennessee (M)
24 at Kansas City
31 at Dallas

November
7 BYE
14 Houston
21 Cleveland
28 at N.Y. Giants

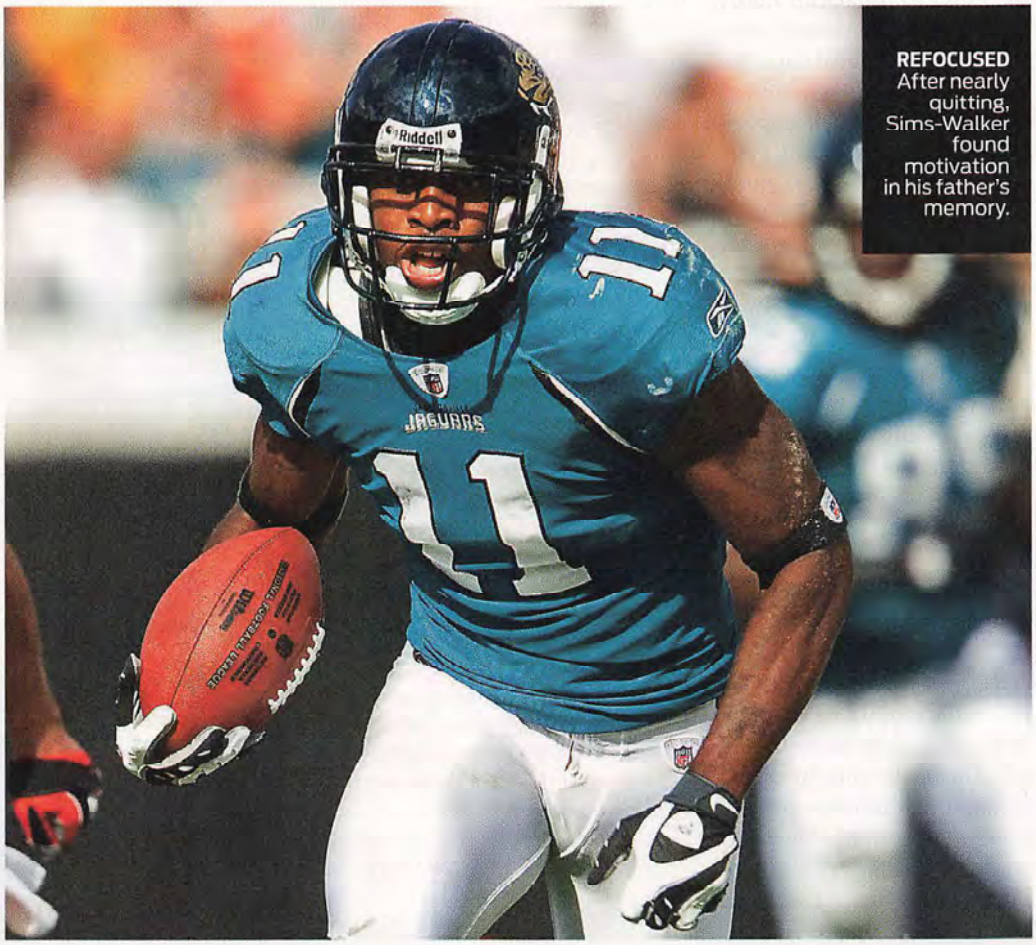
December
5 at Tennessee
12 Oakland
19 at Indianapolis
26 Washington

January
2 at Houston

(M) Monday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **5**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.535**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
A team looking to reverse its slide isn't going to get much help from a brutal road schedule. The Jaguars struggled on the West Coast last season, losing big in Seattle and San Francisco; this year they visit San Diego in Week 2. Jacksonville also travels to face the Cowboys and the Giants, and the Jags are away for their final three games in the division. Ouch.



REFOCUSED After nearly quitting, Sims-Walker found motivation in his father's memory.

GRAY QUETTY/CAL SPORT MEDIA.COM

FOR SOME teams 2010 is make-or-break. But for the Jaguars it may well be the end of days—or at least the end of their run in Jacksonville. Though a college football hotbed, the city has been slow to embrace its pro franchise. Over the past few years support has been further stifled by an economic downturn that has hit northeast Florida especially hard. Last year the team lost 17,000 season-ticket holders and suffered weekly television blackouts as a consequence.

The Jaguars hoped that slashing ticket prices this year would revive their sleepy fan base, but a dispiriting end to the '09 season, which saw the Jags lose their last four games after a 7–5 start, has curbed enthusiasm. (The team needs to sell 3,000 more season tickets to insure there will be no blackouts this year.) What's more, they moved the needle in the wrong direction—and possibly inched the franchise closer to a shift to Los Angeles—by passing on Jacksonville native Tim Tebow in the draft.

The team needs a savior, went the rare impassioned cry. But the good news is, the Jags may already have one in Mike Sims-Walker. Like Tebow, the fourth-year wideout is a local product. He grew up in Orlando and starred at Central Florida, where as a senior in 2006 he gained 1,178 yards on a school-record 90 catches. Jacksonville selected him in the third round the following spring, but Sims-Walker struggled to reach the field. He spent his rookie season on injured reserve with a strained left knee and sat out four more games in '08 with a

asics.com



*sound **mind** sound **body***

PROUD SPONSOR OF THE
ING NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

running cleanses the mind and body

asics®

sprained ligament in his right knee, in which he contracted a staph infection that required hospitalization. "I was like, Damn, every time I get healthy, every time I'm feeling good about myself, I get hurt," Sims-Walker says.

But those body shots were nothing compared to the knockout blow that came when he lost two of the most cherished people in his life in late 2008. Just as Sims-Walker's health was rebounding, his best friend, Winfred Ezell—who bunked with Sims-Walker in Jacksonville, took care of his house and helped nurse him back to strength—was fatally stabbed in an Orlando nightclub. While home for the funeral Sims-Walker doted on his father, Michael Sims, who was battling colon cancer; he died the same day Ezell was buried.

Sims-Walker fell into a deep depression, especially over the loss of his father. "He was my best friend, my heart, my everything," says Sims-Walker, who considered quitting football. "There were some mornings when I decided I wasn't even going to go to practice. I wasn't going to go to the stadium. It was like, I'm about to go get a job. This s--- just ain't workin' for me."

What saved his career was his mother, Barbara Walker, who encouraged him to honor his father by persevering through the injuries and the heartache. Heeding her advice, Sims-Walker attacked his rehab, and once healthy he worked to improve his chemistry with quarterback David Garrard. Soon he was feeling like a man reborn.

In '09 the Jaguars found themselves calling that name a lot. In 15 games he caught 63 passes for 869 yards and seven touchdowns while emerging as a complementary big-play threat to the Jags' other hyphenated star, running back Maurice Jones-Drew. "Last year [Sims-Walker] was able to bring his confidence up and get things going," says Jones-Drew, who achieved personal bests in combined touches (365), yards (1,765) and touchdowns (16) in his first year as Jacksonville's feature back. "Now he's bringing everybody else along with him."

Sims-Walker set the tone in training camp, where he mixed a sense of humor (serenading his fellow receivers in drills) with a sense of purpose. Coach Jack Del Rio said in camp that the Jags' passing game, which in '09 ranked 19th in the NFL, was "substantially ahead" of where it was last year, which goes a long way toward explaining the high expectations that Sims-Walker and his teammates have. "We've got a lot of young, hungry guys—a lot of guys who are trying to prove themselves—and we're working extra hard to do it," Sims-Walker says. "I know for me, my new challenge is to be a leader, to be consistent, to be that guy they can count on to make whatever play they need me to make."

A man on a mission? That's just what a team desperate for a boost needs. —A.L.

SPOTLIGHT

Tyson Alualu, Defensive tackle

JAGUARS COACH Jack Del Rio has built his reputation in Jacksonville on strong defenses. He has fielded units that have ranked sixth or higher in three of his seven years and directed the NFL's second-best defense in 2006. But last year his rep was seriously damaged by a unit that finished 23rd overall.

The '09 group was especially bad against the run, allowing 116.4 yards per game—including a woeful 154.5 over the last four games. To help stanch the bleeding, the Jaguars went hard after tackles in the draft. They selected Cal's Alualu 10th overall, then snagged Louisiana Tech's D'Anthony Smith with their next pick, in the third round. (The consecutive selections marked the third straight year in which the Jags used their first two draft picks on the same position: In '09 they took offensive tackles Eugene Monroe and Eben Britton, and in '08 they drafted defensive ends Derrick Harvey and Quentin Groves.) Add to that mix free-agent defensive end Aaron Kampman—a two-time Pro Bowl pick who is rebounding from reconstructive knee surgery—and the Jags will field a far more athletic line than they did last year.

Alualu might be their most versatile lineman. Although listed as a tackle, he has tweener size (6' 3", 304 pounds) and his high motor and explosiveness make him a natural at end. No matter where Alualu, who had a team-high 7½ sacks as a senior at Cal, lines up, the Jags will be counting on him to help turn up the pressure after having a league-low 14 sacks in '09. "We feel our front is a whole lot better, and it has to be," says Del Rio. His reputation—and his job—may depend on it.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JACK DEL RIO**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 18

QB DAVID GARRARD

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	516	314	60.9
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
3,597	15	10	83.5

RB MAURICE JONES-DREW

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	312	1,391	4.5
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
53	374	7.1	16

FB GREG JONES

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
13	4	23	5.8
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
5	14	2.8	0

WR MIKE SIMS-WALKER

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	63	869	7

WR MIKE THOMAS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	48	453	1

TE MARCEDES LEWIS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	32	518	2

LT EUGENE MONROE

G	HT	WT
15	6' 5"	320

LG KYNAN FORNEY

G	HT	WT
3	6' 3"	302

C BRAD MEESTER

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	311

RG UCHE NWANERI

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	330

RT EBEN BRITTON

G	HT	WT
15	6' 6"	310

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 23

DE DERRICK HARVEY

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	57	2	0

DT TERRANCE KNIGHTON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	45	1½	0

DT *TYSON ALUALU (R)*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	65	7½	0

DE *AARON KAMPMAN*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
9	42	3½	0

LB DARYL SMITH

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	107	1½	1

LB *KIRK MORRISON*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	133	2	0

LB JUSTIN DURANT

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	98	1	1

CB DEREK COX

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	72	0	4

FS REGGIE NELSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	69	0	0

SS GERALD ALEXANDER

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	55	0	2

CB RASHEAN MATHIS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	33	0	3

SPECIAL TEAMS

P ADAM PODLESH

PUNTS	AVG	NET
72	41.9	38.3

K JOSH SCOBEE

FG	XP	POINTS
18–28	30–31	84

PR *SCOTTY McGEE (R)*

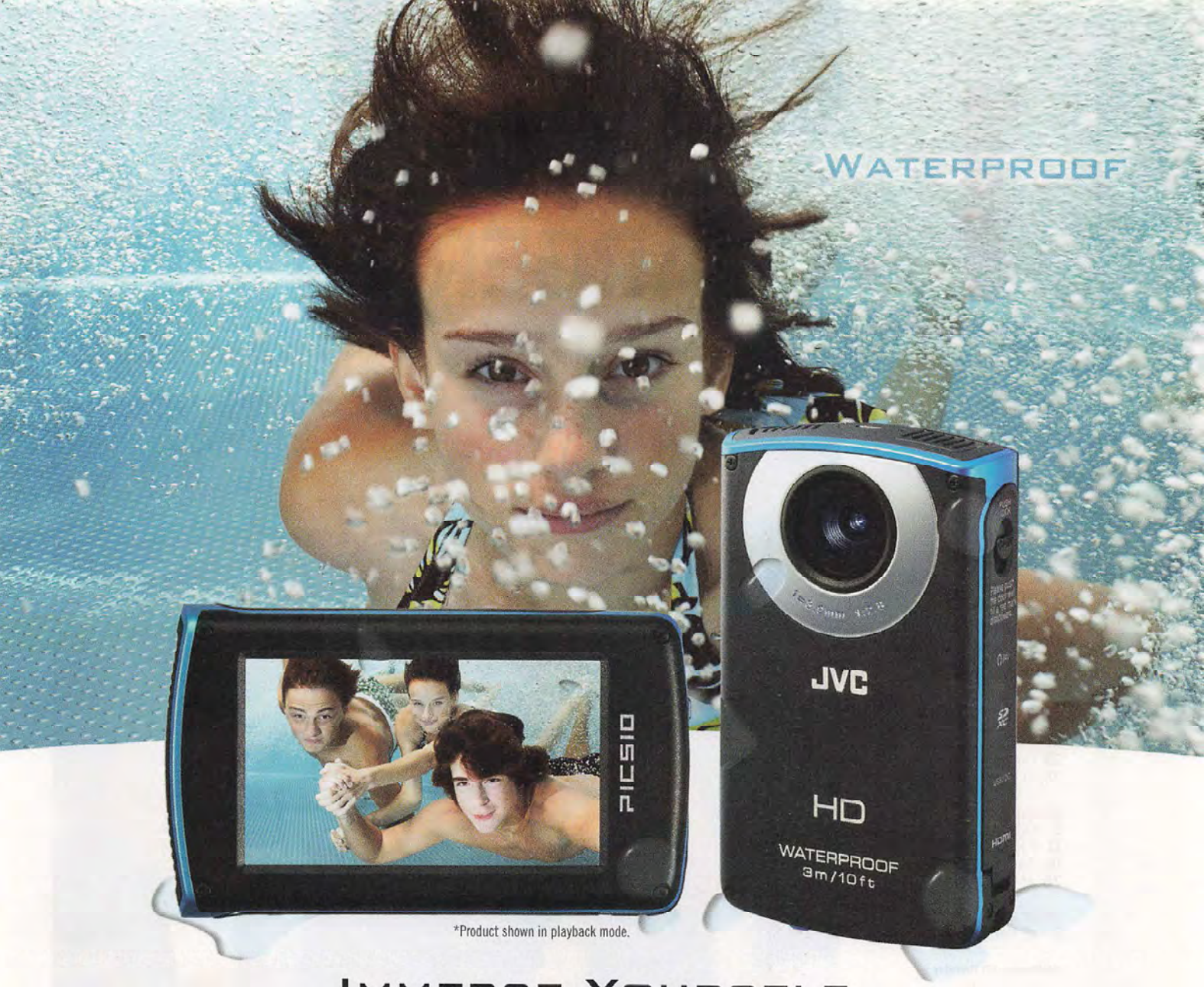
RET	AVG	TD
18	5.4	0

KR *DEJI KARIM (R)*

RET	AVG	TD
14	30.9	1

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

BILL FRAKES



*Product shown in playback mode.

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN MEMORIES.

PICSIO Never miss a moment in or out of the water with JVC's new, super-sporty waterproof HD PICSIO. Submersible up to 10 feet (3 meters) this pocket camera captures both Full HD 1920 x 1080 video and 5 Megapixel digital stills. Its crystal clear three inch touchscreen display allows for instant playback, and simple uploading to **YouTube**™ makes sharing your good times easier than ever. Best of all, no more fear of dropping your camera in the water!

EXPLORE ALL THINGS PICSIO AT JVC.COM.

JVC
The Perfect Experience

1 San Diego CHARGERS

Holdouts at critical positions could scuttle Year 1 of the post-Tomlinson era

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 13–3

September
13 at Kansas City (M)
19 Jacksonville
26 at Seattle

October
3 Arizona
10 at Oakland
17 at St. Louis
24 New England
31 Tennessee

November
7 at Houston
14 BYE
22 Denver (M)
28 at Indianapolis

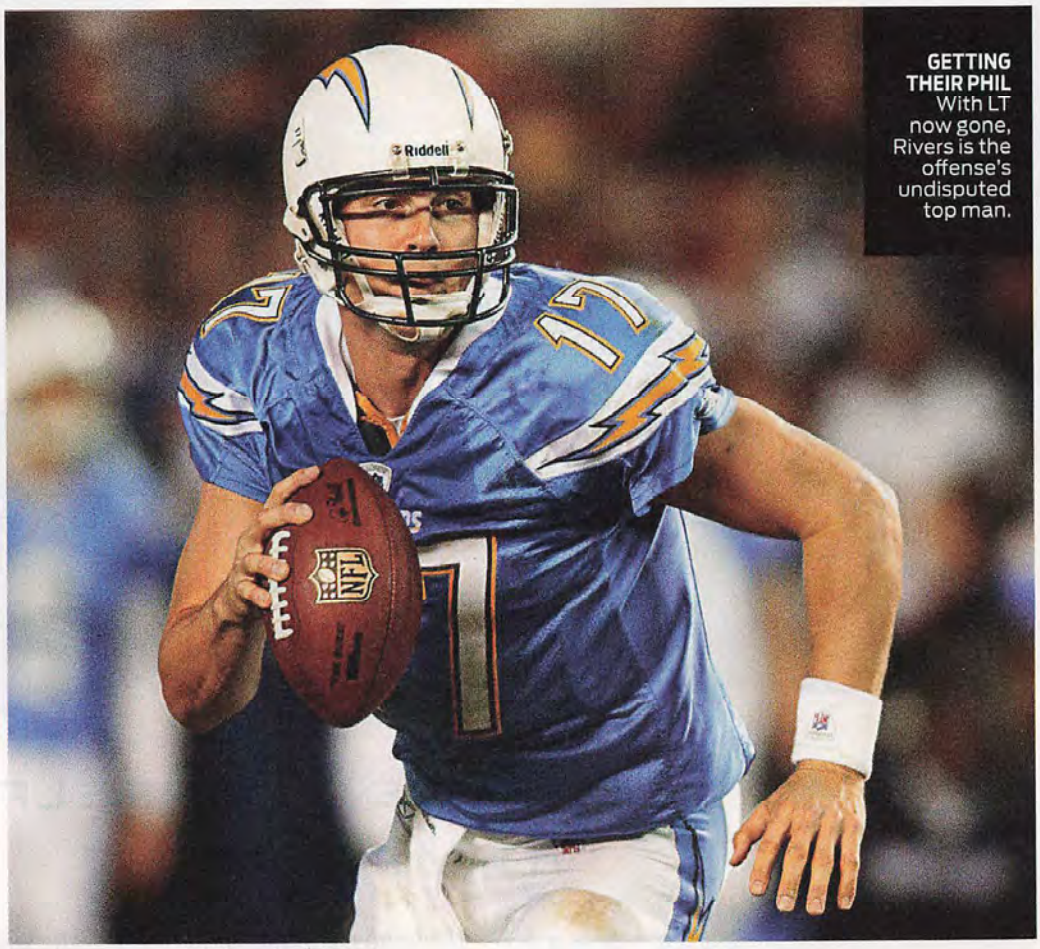
December
5 Oakland
12 Kansas City
16 San Francisco (T)
26 at Cincinnati

January
2 at Denver

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T29**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.453**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
Slow starters the last few seasons, the Chargers should get out of the gate quickly, thanks to a soft first six weeks. In all, San Diego faces just four playoff teams, including the Kurt Warner–less Cardinals in Week 4 and a Patriots team that struggled on the road in '09. Late trips to Indianapolis and Cincinnati could be dicey, but the road back to the playoffs seems smooth.



GETTING THEIR PHIL With LT now gone, Rivers is the offense's undisputed top man.

ROBERT BECK

WHAT IN the name of Rex Ryan has gotten into Norv Turner? The Chargers coach is normally bland and monotone when he says anything for public consumption, but last June, Turner stepped before reporters and said, straight out, that this could be the best team he's had since he took over in San Diego in 2007. So out of character was the boast that listeners had to wonder whether Turner had adopted the old motto, If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Five months earlier Turner's Chargers had been bounced from the playoffs by the brash Ryan and his surging Jets. The defeat was particularly painful because it came at home, after San Diego had won 11 straight games to finish the regular season and seemed on a Super Bowl roll.

Maybe Turner believes that if he says it, his players will start to believe it. But consider: His first Chargers team—which had 11 returning Pro Bowlers from a 14–2 squad—advanced to the AFC Championship Game, and his third went more than two months without losing.

Turner's assessment is even more surprising considering what the Chargers have been through this off-season: They released LaDainian Tomlinson, their alltime leading rusher; traded away cornerback Antonio Cromartie, a three-year starter and former Pro Bowl selection; and took such a hold-the-line stance in contract talks with two-time Pro Bowl left tackle Marcus McNeill and top wideout Vincent Jackson that both have said they'll sit out the season unless they receive more money. Best team? Really?

"It's not spin," Turner says. "We're bigger, we're stronger, and we're faster. Some of the guys we've added and are going to ask to play, *they're* bigger, stronger, faster. So we have a chance to grow as a team."

The Chargers have been trending down the past few years. They won two playoff games in Turner's first season, one in his second and none last year. Something needed to change, and by jettisoning Tomlinson, a former league MVP who was the face of the franchise, the organization believes quarterback Philip Rivers will be able to fully spread his wings.

Rivers was always careful not to step on Tomlinson's toes—particularly when the two-time rushing champ chafed at Turner's decision to run the offense through Rivers's right arm. With that tension gone, everyone can relax and pull in the same direction. Now there's no doubt as to who leads the offense: It's Rivers, who since moving into the starting lineup in 2006 has thrown 105 touchdown passes and is 18–0 in December.

He'll be aided this year by 2010 first-rounder Ryan Mathews, the Fresno State back who was impressive in the preseason. The Chargers think Mathews has more burst and explosiveness than the late-era Tomlinson, whose average plunged under Turner: LT had 5.2 yards per carry in 2006 under Marty Schottenheimer, then 4.7 in Turner's first year, then 3.8 and 3.3.

But the absence of McNeill, Rivers's blind side protector, and Jackson, his favorite wideout target, undoubtedly will hurt. The Chargers have no experienced left tackle to fill in for McNeill. Brandyn Dombrowski, an undrafted free agent in 2008, is the projected starter. He performed well at right tackle in nine starts (including the playoff game) last season but has barely played on the other side of the line.

Legedu Naanee and Buster Davis are expected to pick up the slack for Jackson, but neither has his combination of size (6' 5", 230 pounds), speed and athleticism. Jackson is the only player in the league to average more than 17 yards a catch in each of the past two seasons, and he's the target Rivers has looked for, even more than tight end Antonio Gates, when San Diego needs a big play.

To their credit the Chargers are not wringing their hands over their high-profile holdouts. And with a soft schedule that includes a nonconference slate against the lowly NFC West, they're capable of matching or exceeding last season's 13 wins. But to become Turner's best team, they need to reach the Super Bowl—at least.

"It can be done," says cornerback Quentin Jammer. "I just wish we could get those two other guys in here. But we have a great team. We've been together for a while, and we have an opportunity to get what we want accomplished. I've seen teams do it with less."

And as Turner might say, less can be more. —*Jim Trotter*

SPOTLIGHT

Ryan Mathews, Running back

LOOKING FOR a rookie to break out the big numbers this year? Mathews might be the man. So smitten were the Chargers with Mathews's big-play potential that they traded their first-, second- and fourth-round draft picks, plus linebacker Tim Dobbins, to Miami to move up 16 spots and select Mathews 12th overall. As a junior at Fresno State last year he ran for 1,808 yards, averaged 6.6 yards a carry and scored 19 touchdowns. He has the size (6 feet, 218 pounds) to run through tacklers and the burst to slip through holes before they close. But physical skills aren't the only reason Mathews could put up eye-popping stats.

Chargers coach Norv Turner was irked in recent years by LaDainian Tomlinson's claim that his drop in production was a result of a change in Turner's strategy, away from the run and toward the passing game. In 2006, under former coach Marty Schottenheimer, Tomlinson ran for a league-high 1,815 yards and 28 touchdowns. But his numbers bottomed out at a career-low 730 yards in 2009, and the Chargers let him go after nine seasons.

Turner envisions Mathews carrying at least 300 times in his first year—a figure Tomlinson didn't reach in either of the last two seasons. The former Bulldog had 17 runs of 20 or more yards last season, and Turner, who is sensitive to criticism he believes is unwarranted, may try to make the point that the running game's struggles were about Tomlinson's declining skills more than they were about his play-calling, the offensive line or some other factor. "Maybe subconsciously there is a desire to do that," Turner says. "[But] I hate to get to where you personalize something."

Translation: It's personal.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **NORV TURNER**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 10

QB **PHILIP RIVERS**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	486	317	65.2
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
4,254	28	9	104.4

RB ***RYAN MATHEWS (R)***

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
12	276	1,808	6.6
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
11	122	11.1	19

FB **JACOB HESTER**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
15	21	74	3.5
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
9	24	2.7	0

WR **MALCOM FLOYD**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	45	776	1

WR **LEGEDU NAANEE**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	24	242	2

TE **ANTONIO GATES**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	79	1,157	8

LT **BRANDYN DOMBROWSKI**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	323

LG **KRIS DIELMAN**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	320

C **NICK HARDWICK**

G	HT	WT
3	6' 4"	305

RG **LOUIS VASQUEZ**

G	HT	WT
14	6' 5"	335

RT **JEROMEY CLARY**

G	HT	WT
10	6' 6"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 16

DE **JACQUES CESAIRE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	26	1	0

NT **OGEMDI NWAGBUO**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	19	1	0

DE **LUIS CASTILLO**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	25	2	0

LB **SHAUN PHILLIPS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	59	7	0

LB **STEPHEN COOPER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	102	0	0

LB **BRANDON SILER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	67	2	1

LB **SHAWNE MERRIMAN**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	36	4	0

CB **QUENTIN JAMMER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	58	0	3

FS **ERIC WEDDLE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	82	1½	2

SS ***DARRELL STUCKEY (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	93	1	1

CB **ANTOINE CASON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	41	0	2

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **MIKE SCIFRES**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
52	45.0	39.2

K **NATE KAEDING**

FG	XP	POINTS
32-35	50-51	146

PR **DARREN SPROLES**

RET	AVG	TD
26	7.0	1

KR **DARREN SPROLES**

RET	AVG	TD
54	24.1	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

2 Oakland RAIDERS

The ground game could be solid if Darren McFadden can stay on the field

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 5–11

September
12 at Tennessee
19 St. Louis
26 at Arizona

October
3 Houston
10 San Diego
17 at San Francisco
24 at Denver
31 Seattle

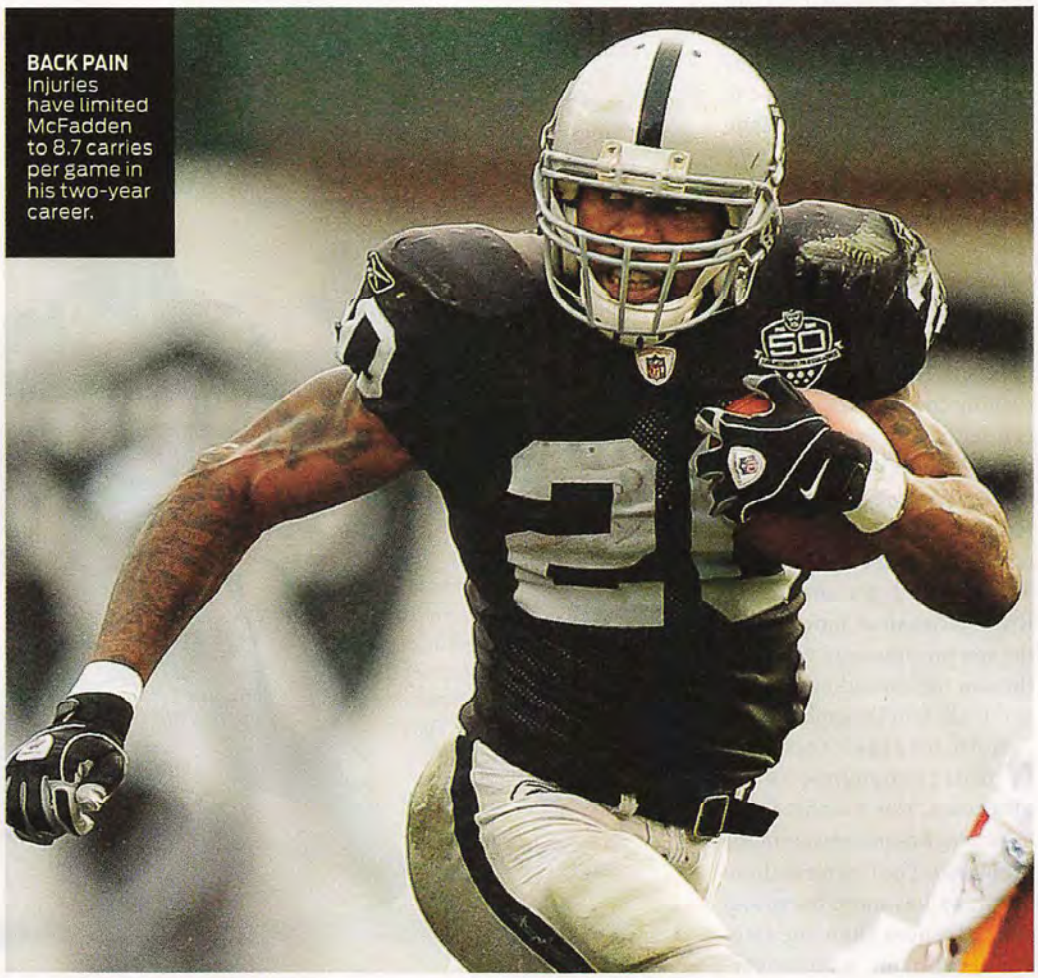
November
7 Kansas City
14 BYE
21 at Pittsburgh
28 Miami

December
5 at San Diego
12 at Jacksonville
19 Denver
26 Indianapolis

January
2 at Kansas City

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T16**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.500**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
The Raiders can't blame the schedule if they fail to snap their streak of seven straight losing seasons. Oakland faces only three playoff teams and has just two potential cold-weather games: in Pittsburgh in November and in Kansas City in January. If the team remains in the playoff hunt, its finale against the Chiefs shouldn't be daunting: The Raiders have won three in a row at Arrowhead.



BACK PAIN Injuries have limited McFadden to 8.7 carries per game in his two-year career.

TONY MEDINA/ICON SMI

RUNNING BACK Darren McFadden arrived for training camp thicker in his chest and shoulders and stronger in his conviction that this would be the year he'd finally fulfill the potential that made him the fourth pick in the 2008 draft. Yet after a week the former Arkansas star was back where he hoped he'd never be again: on the sideline with an injury.

A strained left hamstring, which cost him 17 days of practice and two exhibition games, was the latest in a string of setbacks for McFadden. He missed three games and parts of at least a half dozen more as a rookie because of toe and ankle injuries, and last season he was sidelined for four games and parts of a handful of others because of a torn meniscus in his right knee.

With each appearance on the injury report, questions grow louder about whether McFadden will ever be the feature back the Raiders envisioned after they made him the first running back taken in '08—ahead of fellow first-rounders Jonathan Stewart (No. 13, Carolina), Felix Jones (22, Dallas), Rashard Mendenhall (23, Pittsburgh) and Chris Johnson (24, Tennessee). "You hear that a lot," says McFadden, who never missed a game because of injury in three seasons at Arkansas. "But people on the outside are always going to say what they want. As long as people in this organization and around the team have faith in me, that's all I need. Because I know I can do it if I'm given the opportunity."

Oakland desperately wants him to be that guy after signing him to a deal that includes $26 million in guarantees. The Raiders have not had a true feature back since Bo Jackson in 1990. Over the past two decades they've gotten by with a hodgepodge of halfbacks—from veterans at the ends of their careers (Roger Craig and Eric Dickerson) to undersized talents (Napoleon Kaufman and Charlie Garner) to overachievers (Tyrone Wheatley, Amos Zereoue and Justin Fargas) to neverweres (Greg Robinson and Harvey Williams).

McFadden was supposed to have the goods to make Raider Nation forget all of them. At 6' 2", 210 pounds with 4.33 speed in the 40, he dominated college football's best conference during his three seasons, averaging 120.8 yards a game and 5.9 yards a carry while rushing for 41 touchdowns. He had at least one touchdown run of 70 yards or longer in each season and was also a threat as a receiver. But the big plays and big games have eluded him with the Raiders. He ran for 164 yards at Kansas City in his second game as a pro but has since gone 23 consecutive games without breaking 100. In 21 of those games he failed to reach 50 yards.

His problem is simple: a lack of durability. McFadden has had more than 14 carries in a game only twice in his career. "I've said it a bunch of times that the biggest factor with Darren is that he's been out of the lineup so much with a little injury here, injury there," coach Tom Cable says. "But when he's been healthy, he's been very productive. This is a big year for him, just like it is for everyone. He'll step up. I have no doubt about that."

In the off-season the Raiders released Fargas, a workhorse who led them in rushing three of the past four years. Injuries and his punishing running style sapped the 30-year-old Fargas, now with the Broncos, of his speed and burst, but Cable says Fargas was let go primarily to create more opportunities for McFadden, who will split time with camp roommate Michael Bush.

Bush, who is also in his third season, is a developing talent who has the team's last three 100-yard rushing games (one in 2008, two in '09). But while Bush is more physical than McFadden, whose slender legs make it difficult for him to break tackles and push the pile, Cable has no plans to change the way he uses McFadden, who returned to practice on Aug. 24.

"Not at all," says Cable. "For Darren, I think one of the keys has to do with him understanding the NFL and how to take care of your body and how to prepare. He's learning that. He's had as good an off-season as anybody on our team. I'm not sure anybody ever really gets into a rhythm when there's a third body in there; that's why we made the move that we made with Justin. This way there should be plenty of opportunity for Darren to get going."

But with Bush waiting in the wings, McFadden's window of opportunity might not be open for too long. —J.T.

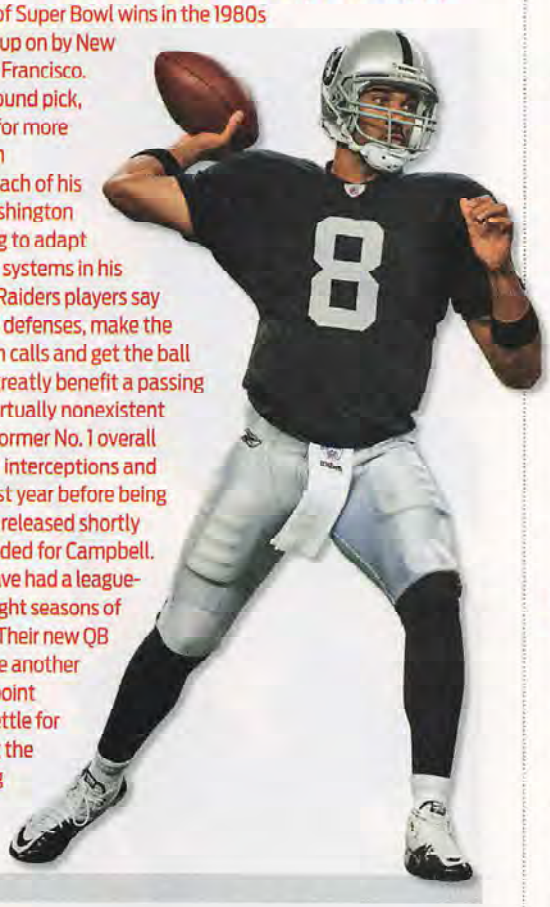
SPOTLIGHT

Jason Campbell, Quarterback

THE CURRENT of optimism running through the Raiders' camp is due largely to the April 24 trade for former Washington starter Campbell, who in his four-year career has been everything departed JaMarcus Russell was not: hardworking, studious, conscientious and able to lead by example. Owner Al Davis has gone so far as to compare Campbell with Jim Plunkett, the castoff turned champion who led the Raiders to a pair of Super Bowl wins in the 1980s after being given up on by New England and San Francisco.

A 2005 first-round pick, Campbell threw for more touchdowns than interceptions in each of his seasons with Washington despite struggling to adapt to three different systems in his four years there. Raiders players say his ability to read defenses, make the correct protection calls and get the ball out on time will greatly benefit a passing game that was virtually nonexistent under Russell, a former No. 1 overall pick who threw 11 interceptions and only three TDs last year before being benched. He was released shortly after Oakland traded for Campbell.

The Raiders have had a league-record seven straight seasons of 11 or more losses. Their new QB may or may not be another Plunkett; at this point Oakland would settle for his simply leading the team to a winning season.



BOB ROSATO

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **TOM CABLE**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 31

QB ***JASON CAMPBELL***

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	507	327	64.5
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
3,618	20	15	86.4

RB **DARREN McFADDEN**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
12	104	357	3.4
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
21	245	11.7	1

FB **MARCEL REECE**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
2	0	0	–
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
2	20	10.0	0

WR **CHAZ SCHILENS**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
8	29	365	2

WR **DARRIUS HEYWARD-BEY**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
11	9	124	1

TE **ZACH MILLER**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	66	805	3

LT **MARIO HENDERSON**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 7"	300

LG **ROBERT GALLERY**

G	HT	WT
6	6' 7"	325

C **SAMSON SATELE**

G	HT	WT
15	6' 3"	300

RG **COOPER CARLISLE**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	295

RT **LANGSTON WALKER**

G	HT	WT
7	6' 8"	360

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 26

DE ***LAMARR HOUSTON (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	46	8	0

DT **TOMMY KELLY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	55	1	0

DT **RICHARD SEYMOUR**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	47	4	0

DE **MATT SHAUGHNESSY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	29	4	0

LB **TREVOR SCOTT**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	43	7	0

LB ***ROLANDO McCLAIN (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	105	4	2

LB ***KAMERION WIMBLEY***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	69	6½	0

CB **NNAMDI ASOMUGHA**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	34	0	1

FS **HIRAM EUGENE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	43	0	1

SS **TYVON BRANCH**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	124	1	0

CB **CHRIS JOHNSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	68	0	3

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **SHANE LECHLER**

PUNTS	AVG	NET AVG
96	51.1	43.9

K **SEBASTIAN JANIKOWSKI**

FG	XP	POINTS
26-29	17-17	95

PR **JOHNNIE LEE HIGGINS**

RET	AVG	TD
34	5.2	0

KR ***ROCK CARTWRIGHT***

RET	AVG	TD
39	22.3	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Denver BRONCOS

It's Kyle Orton's team—for now—and he looks ready to rise to the challenge

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 8–8

September
12 at Jacksonville
19 Seattle
26 Indianapolis

October
3 at Tennessee
10 at Baltimore
17 N.Y. Jets
24 Oakland
31 vs. San Francisco*

November
7 BYE
14 Kansas City
22 at San Diego (M)
28 St. Louis

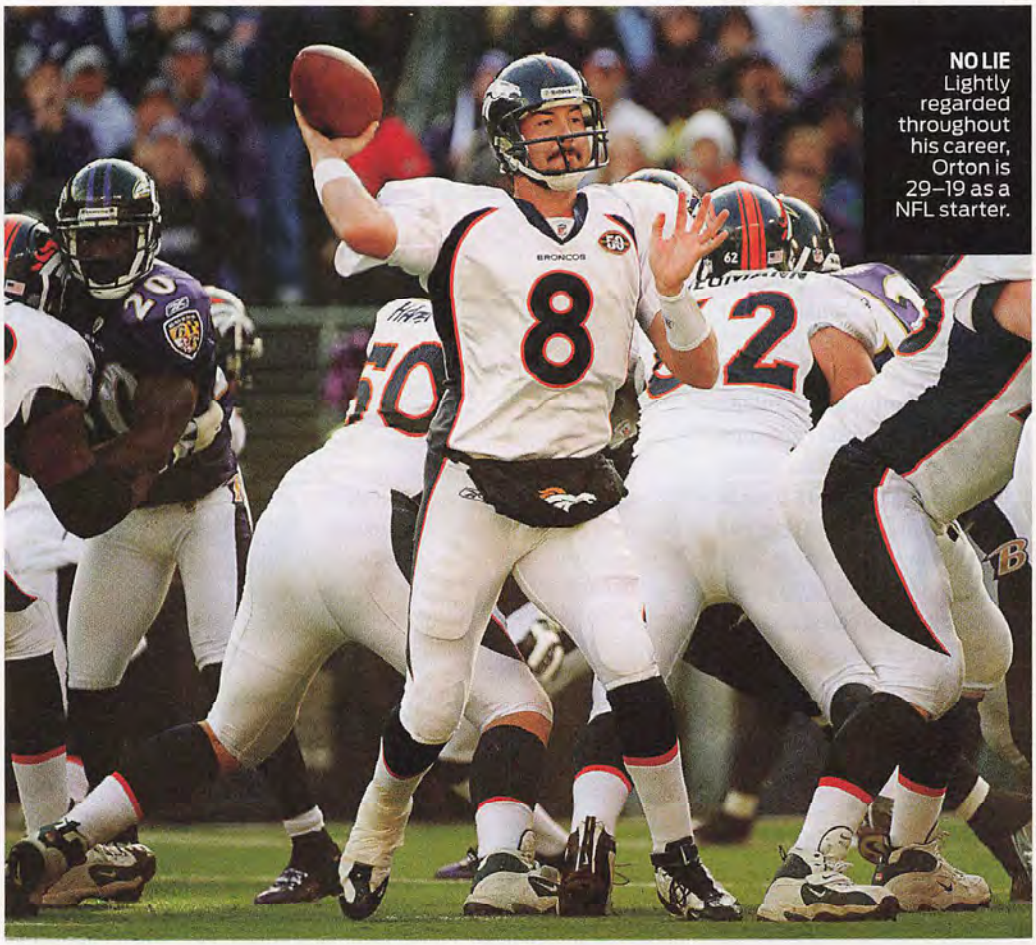
December
5 at Kansas City
12 at Arizona
19 at Oakland
26 Houston

January
2 San Diego

(M) Monday *In London

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **24**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.484**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **6**

ANALYSIS
Don't look for a hot start like last year's 6–0, with tough tests—the Colts, Ravens and Jets—coming in the first six games, before Denver faces its first divisional opponent. Can quarterback Kyle Orton emerge from that brutal stretch unscathed? And can the Broncos handle their AFC West rivals at Invesco? Denver was 0–3 at home and 3–0 on the road within the division in 2009.



NO LIE Lightly regarded throughout his career, Orton is 29–19 as a NFL starter.

DAVID BERGMAN

KYLE ORTON stepped onto the 17th tee box at Cherry Creek Country Club in Denver last June, lined up a 190-yard shot and released his Mizuno seven-iron with a swing that was as sweet as it was controlled. The ball arced against the pale-blue sky, and when it landed softly and vanished into the cup for a hole in one, hollers and high fives broke the serenity. Yet the excitement that filled the air that day paled next to the joy Orton felt on Aug. 19 when the Broncos signed him to a one-year contract extension that could bring him $12 million over the next two years.

Few quarterbacks have been as undervalued as Orton in recent years. Despite ranking eighth among active QBs in career winning percentage (he's 29–19 as a starter, 60.4%), third in winning percentage at home (19–5, 79.2%) and fifth in red-zone touchdown-to-interception differential (39 TDs, three picks inside the 20), he'd never been the highest-paid QB on his team and was viewed mostly as a capable stopgap until someone better could be found.

Orton led the Bears to an NFC North title as a rookie in 2005 and was 9–6 as Chicago's starter in 2008, but even so the organization was committed to former first-round pick Rex Grossman, who had a stronger arm but lacked the challenger's efficiency and leadership skills. Sent to Denver last year as part of the Jay Cutler deal, Orton had the sixth-most-productive season ever for a Broncos quarterback (3,802 passing yards) and tied Hall of Famer John Elway's club mark of 10 games with a passer rating above 90.



Your son wants to join the Military.

The question isn't whether he's prepared enough, but whether you are.

IT'S A BIG DECISION. TALK ABOUT IT.

TODAYSMILITARY.COM

ARMY
MARINE CORPS
NAVY
AIR FORCE
COAST GUARD

•ACTIVE •GUARD •RESERVE

Nevertheless, in March, Denver dealt for former Browns first-round pick Brady Quinn, and the next month the Broncos, in the most surprising move of the 2010 draft, traded up in the first round to select Florida icon Tim Tebow.

"I've said before that I've always been underappreciated outside my locker room but very appreciated inside it," Orton, a Broncos captain in 2009, noted before the extension was signed. "It's a double-edged sword. Nowadays you kind of get left behind if you're not a self-promoter. That's not my personality. I'd rather be out of the limelight. But at some point it does hurt you from a financial standpoint if you're not putting yourself out there."

Coach Josh McDaniels said the addition of Quinn and Tebow was meant to challenge everyone at the position rather than challenge Orton's hold on the job. "We don't go into the off-season saying, 'Let's address every position but quarterback because we might offend whoever is playing that spot,' " McDaniels says. "We've got to try to push [the quarterback] too. To me, the way Kyle has responded is more important than any perceived message."

Orton has had the best camp of his career. He appears comfortable and authoritative in the huddle and at the line of scrimmage. The knock on him always has been arm strength, but all through August he was zipping balls into windows as few thought he could do.

The surge in form is due in part to good health. When he arrived in Denver last year, Orton still was bothered by a lingering injury to his left ankle. Just when he began to feel fully recovered, he sprained his right ankle in a Nov. 15 loss at Washington. Rather than sit and heal, Orton played on, to the detriment of his numbers. He failed to record a passer rating in excess of 100.0 after doing it four times in the first nine games.

Orton and the rest of the offensive players are also now more familiar with McDaniels's complex playbook. In 2009 Orton often had a split second of uncertainty because he was thinking not only about whether he was doing the right thing, but whether his receivers were in the right place, too. At times, wideouts were more concerned with getting open themselves than with creating opportunities for teammates. "It's hard to tell a guy to run a route not to get open; that's going to take a little bit of practice," says receiver Eddie Royal, chuckling. "But we now understand the offense, and how based on certain coverages we have to give ourselves up for a bigger play to a guy behind us."

Based on his performance in the preseason and at training camp, Orton could be poised for a career year. If he plays well, that would also allow the Broncos to bring along Tebow at a controlled pace, and it would reaffirm McDaniels's message that hard work pays off. "He's a great example of what we tell the team every single spring, every single training camp and every single regular season as it starts: The best players will play," the coach says. "I don't care when they were drafted, what their salary is, how many years they've been in the league. Our job is to win games, and the only way I know how to do that is to try to get the best 11 on every snap. I think this situation has made [Orton] a better player." And made him feel wanted for the first time in his career. —J.T.

SPOTLIGHT

Robert Ayers, Linebacker

THE defensive player the Broncos could least afford to lose sustained a potentially season-ending tear of his pectoral muscle in the first week of training camp. Denver is hoping that outside linebacker Elvis Dumervil, who led the league in sacks in 2009 with 17 and had 43 in his first four seasons, can return late in the year. In the meantime all eyes will be on Robert Ayers, the second of the Broncos' two first-round draft picks last year.

Ayers was a nonfactor in 2009. He started only one game, finished with just 19 tackles and failed to register a sack despite playing mostly on passing downs. And he raised eyebrows in the off-season when he was benched for the first two days of full-squad minicamp because of a "coaching decision."

Ayers, 24, appears to have matured since then. The 6' 3", 274-pound former Tennessee Volunteer showed flashes of fulfilling his potential in training camp and even broke through for a half sack—his first as a pro—in the second preseason game, at Detroit. He's projected to be an every-down player this year, and he'll have to make his presence felt if the Broncos are to challenge for the AFC West title. No one on the 2010 roster outside of Dumervil had more than four sacks last season. If Ayers doesn't step up, Denver will have to take more risks to get to the quarterback, and that could create more big-play opportunities for opponents.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JOSH McDANIELS**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 15

QB KYLE ORTON

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	541	336	62.1
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
3,802	21	12	86.8

RB KNOWSHON MORENO

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	247	947	3.8
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
28	213	7.6	9

FB SPENCER LARSEN

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
9	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
0	0	—	0

WR EDDIE ROYAL

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	37	345	2

WR JABAR GAFFNEY

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	54	732	2

TE DANIEL GRAHAM

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	28	289	1

LT RYAN CLADY

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	325

LG *ZANE BEADLES (R)*

G	HT	WT
13	6' 4"	305

C *J.D. WALTON (R)*

G	HT	WT
12	6' 3"	305

RG CHRIS KUPER

G	HT	WT
15	6' 4"	303

RT RYAN HARRIS

G	HT	WT
8	6' 5"	300

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 7

DE RYAN McBEAN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	25	0	0

NT *JAMAL WILLIAMS*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
1	3	0	0

DE *JUSTIN BANNAN*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	35	0	0

LB MARIO HAGGAN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	63	1	0

LB D.J. WILLIAMS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	122	3½	0

LB *AKIN AYODELE*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	71	0	0

LB ROBERT AYERS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	19	0	0

CB CHAMP BAILEY

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	74	0	3

FS BRIAN DAWKINS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	116	0	2

SS RENALDO HILL

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	59	2	2

CB ANDRE' GOODMAN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	44	1	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P BRITTON COLQUITT*

PUNTS	AVG	NET
42	43.4	N/A

K MATT PRATER

FG	XP	POINTS
30-35	32-32	122

PR EDDIE ROYAL

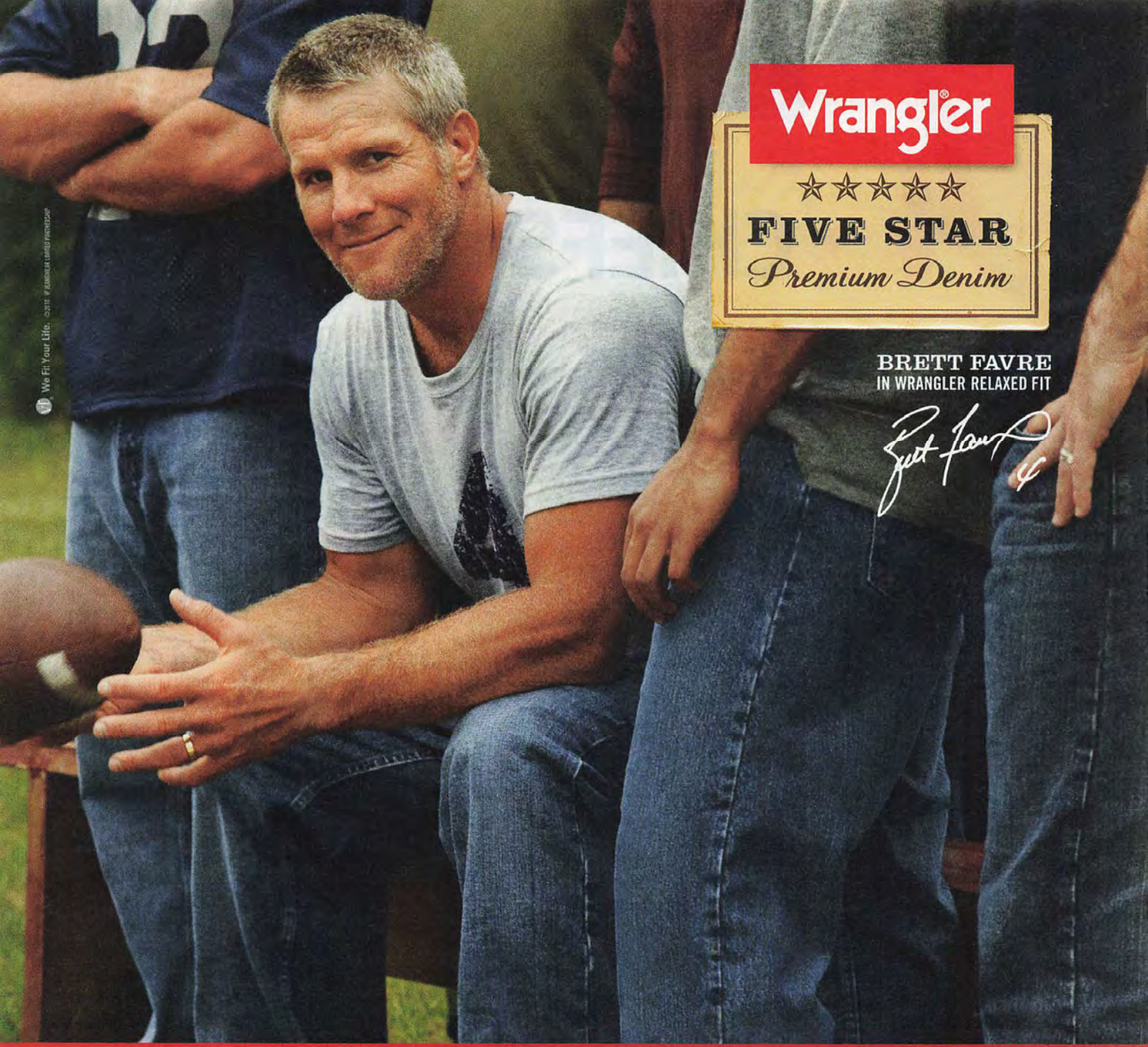
RET	AVG	TD
30	11.2	1

KR EDDIE ROYAL

RET	AVG	TD
26	23.9	1

New acquisition
(R) Rookie **2008 college stats*
TTD: Total touchdowns

RON CHENOY/US PRESSWIRE



NOTHING BEATS WRANGLER

COMFORT

{ JEANS THAT FIT YOU RIGHT }



4 Kansas City CHIEFS

The draft class of 2010 should set the tone for a long-term turnaround

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 4–12

September
13 San Diego (M)
19 at Cleveland
26 San Francisco

October
3 BYE
10 at Indianapolis
17 at Houston
24 Jacksonville
31 Buffalo

November
7 at Oakland
14 at Denver
21 Arizona
28 at Seattle

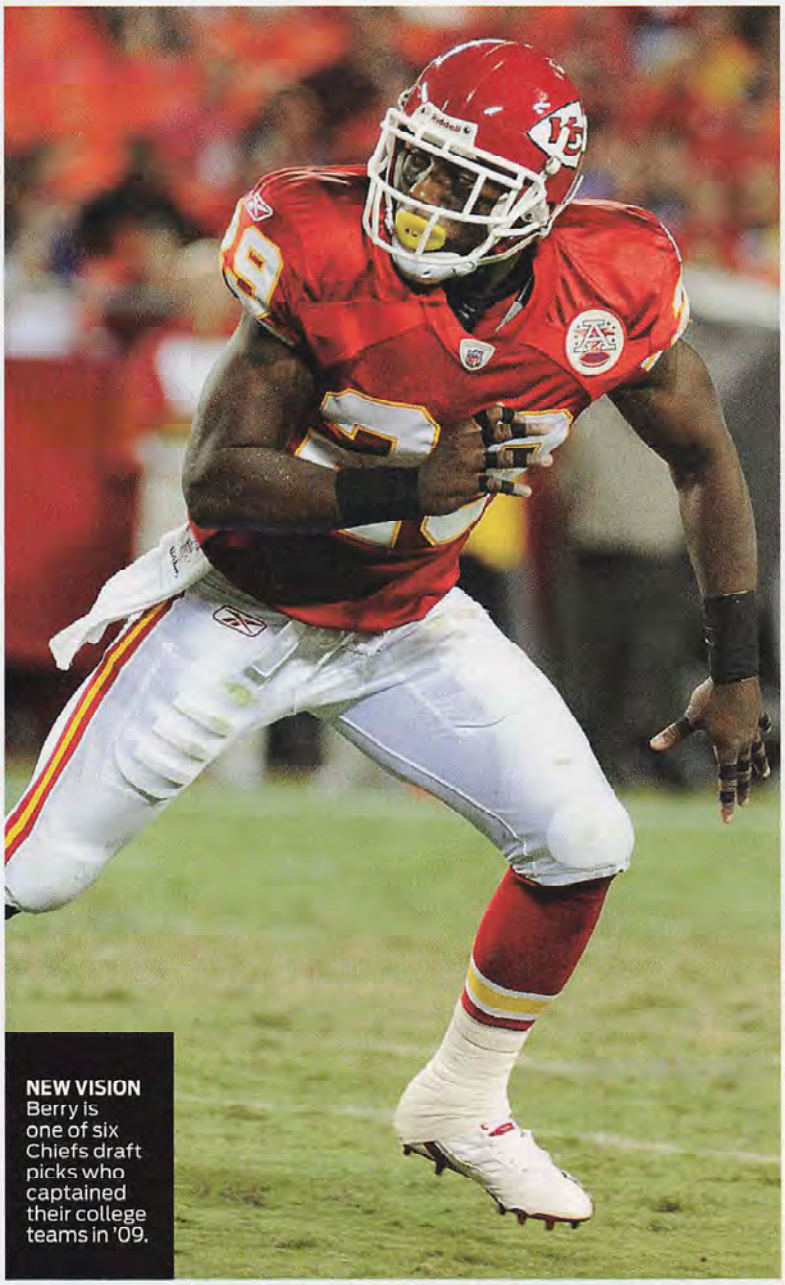
December
5 Denver
12 at San Diego
19 at St. Louis
26 Tennessee

January
2 Oakland

(M) Monday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T22**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.488**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
Here's a case where a soft schedule can help a struggling club. Even with a difficult trip to Indianapolis in Week 5, Kansas City has the easiest out-of-division slate—including Buffalo and Jacksonville at home—of any AFC West team. If the Chiefs emerge from the early part of their schedule in decent shape, a stretch of winnable midseason games could set them up for a surprise playoff run.



NEW VISION Berry is one of six Chiefs draft picks who captained their college teams in '09.

DAVID E. KLUTHO

WHEN GENERAL manager Scott Pioli and coach Todd Haley arrived in early 2009 and got a feel for their team, they quickly realized the Chiefs needed a few good men. Pioli and Haley found the locker room almost devoid of veteran leaders who knew how to set an example for younger teammates. So in came the likes of Mike Vrabel, Zach Thomas and Mike Brown on defense, and Bobby Engram, Amani Toomer and Mike Goff on offense. The payoff was disappointing, however—with the exception of Vrabel, the former Patriots linebacker who owns three Super Bowl rings, those veteran additions had little left in the tank, and proud old pros like Thomas and Toomer didn't even make it out of the preseason.

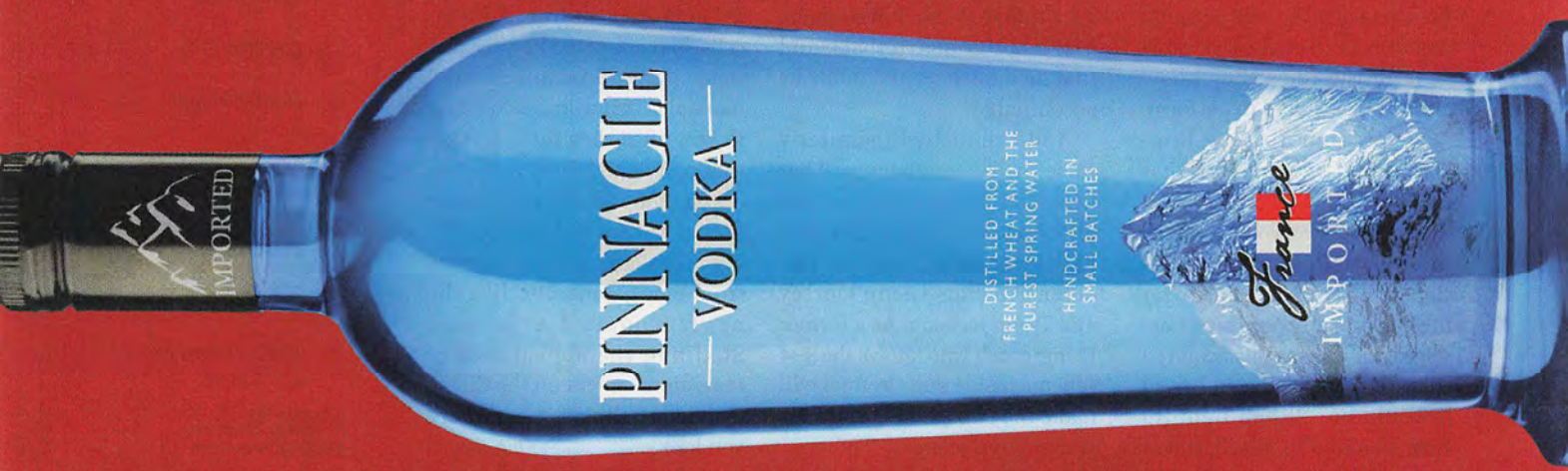
Nevertheless, Pioli and Haley had identified a glaring deficiency. So they once again addressed the issue this off-season, taking a slightly different tack. Kansas City added a few still-productive veterans, particularly running back Thomas Jones and guard Ryan Lilja, and made it a priority to re-sign Vrabel. But the Chiefs' brain trust focused primarily on drafting building-block players who've exhibited strong leadership skills at every level they've played.

Six of Kansas City's seven selections in April were team captains last season, including first-round safety Eric Berry (Tennessee), second-round receiver and return man Dex-



Honor thy team.

Honor thy drink.



PinnacleVodka.com ©2010 White Rock Distilleries, Inc. Distilled in France. Imported and bottled by White Rock Distilleries, Inc., Lewiston, ME. 40% Alc./Vol. (80 Proof) PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

ter McCluster (Mississippi), second-round cornerback Javier Arenas (Alabama), third-round tight end Tony Moeaki (Iowa) and fifth-round safety Kendrick Lewis (Mississippi). Not only did the Chiefs reap a mature crop of rookies, but most of those players also appear ready to grow quickly into contributors. If they do, the 2010 draft could go down as a franchise turning point, representing the first step back toward playoff contention for a club that has won just 10 games in the past three years and last made the postseason in 2006.

"That work of rebuilding a program is not always a fun and pleasant experience early on," said Haley, who was 4–12 as a rookie coach in 2009. "You have to stay the course while you're trying to change the mind-set of grown men who think they're already doing things the way they should be done. But at least we got that painful part over with. I don't know if we can be any good, but we're going to be better, and things are going in the right direction."

Kansas City also acquired new coordinators in Charlie Weis (offense) and Romeo Crennel (defense), two old pros who won't suit up but will make an impact all the same. Both are coming off less-than-stellar stints as head coaches—Weis for five seasons at Notre Dame and Crennel for four with the Browns—and the conventional wisdom is that they're both back in the roles they know and are best suited to perform.

Weis's time in New England didn't overlap with that of Chiefs quarterback Matt Cassel, but the two know each through their mutual friendship with Tom Brady, and so far the fit has been everything Cassel, whom Kansas City acquired from the Pats last year, hoped it would be. "When I got [to New England in 2005], it was all Charlie Weis stories, and it was all great stuff," says Cassel. "Tom said Coach Weis made him a better quarterback and that he'll push us and make us accountable."

And Crennel will similarly raise the bar on defense. That means it's put-up time for a couple of top five draft picks who have underwhelmed thus far: defensive ends Glenn Dorsey and Tyson Jackson. As a former D-line coach who knows the 3–4 scheme inside out, Crennel will make the two ex–LSU stars his personal projects.

Haley, Crennel, Weis and Pioli all learned coaching and personnel management from Bill Parcells, and one of the key instructions in the Tuna's turnaround manual is that teams won't start to win until they fully develop the second- and third-year players on their rosters. That means that in Kansas City the rebuilding is probably a season or two from being done. But like the newly renovated Arrowhead Stadium, the appearance of real improvement on the Chiefs is evident almost everywhere you look. —*Don Banks*

SPOTLIGHT

Thomas Jones, Running back

IT'S NOT every year that a 1,400-yard rusher winds up on the open market, but when Jones wasn't asked back by the Jets, despite finishing third in the league with a career-best 1,402 rushing yards and scoring 14 touchdowns, the Chiefs quickly signed the 10-year veteran to a two-year, $5 million deal.

Jones turned 32 last month, which to some extent explains his availability, but only the Titans' Chris Johnson had more 100-yard games (12) than Jones's seven last season. The tandem of Jones and third-year back Jamaal Charles gives Kansas City a pairing that produced two of the five best rushing days of 2009. Charles, who gained 1,120 yards while starting just 10 games, rolled for 259 yards in a Week 17 win at Denver, and Jones plowed for 210 yards against the Bills in mid-October.



But Jones's robust production is only part of his appeal to the Chiefs. His businesslike approach to the game is contagious. Just ask his former New York teammates, many of whom bemoaned the Jets' willingness to let him walk. "Thomas Jones, he's off the charts," says K.C. coach Todd Haley. "I've never been around somebody who's the complete package like him. The guy is a beast."

With Jones and Charles moving the chains and shifty rookie Dexter McCluster adding some wiggle to the Kansas City ground game, there's no AFC West backfield that goes deeper. The combination could carry the Chiefs' offense further than it has been since the high-scoring Dick Vermeil era.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **TODD HALEY**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 25

QB **MATT CASSEL**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
15	493	271	55.0
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
2,924	16	16	69.9

RB ***THOMAS JONES***

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	331	1,402	4.2
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
10	58	5.8	14

FB **TIM CASTILLE**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
7	14	55	3.9
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
4	37	9.3	1

WR **DWAYNE BOWE**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
11	47	589	4

WR **CHRIS CHAMBERS**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	45	730	5

TE **LEONARD POPE**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
13	20	174	1

LT **BRANDEN ALBERT**

G	HT	WT
14	6'5"	316

LG **BRIAN WATERS**

G	HT	WT
15	6'3"	320

C **RUDY NISWANGER**

G	HT	WT
16	6'5"	301

RG ***RYAN LILJA***

G	HT	WT
16	6'2"	290

RT **RYAN O'CALLAGHAN**

G	HT	WT
14	6'7"	330

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 30

DE **TYSON JACKSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	38	0	0

NT **RON EDWARDS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	29	0	0

DE **GLENN DORSEY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	54	1	0

LB **MIKE VRABEL**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	52	2	0

LB **DERRICK JOHNSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	37	1	3

LB **JOVAN BELCHER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	48	0	0

LB **TAMBA HALI**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	62	8½	0

CB **BRANDON FLOWERS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	65	0	5

FS **JON McGRAW**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	46	1	1

SS ***ERIC BERRY (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	87	0	2

CB **BRANDON CARR**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	62	0	1

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **DUSTIN COLQUITT**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
96	45.4	40.8

K **RYAN SUCCOP**

FG	XP	POINTS
25-29	29-29	104

PR ***JAVIER ARENAS (R)***

RET	AVG	TD
32	15.4	1

KR ***JAVIER ARENAS (R)***

RET	AVG	TD
19	29.0	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

AL MESSERSCHMIDT/GETTY IMAGES

KILLER APP MEETS KILLER OFFER.

TRADE FREE FOR 60 DAYS
PLUS GET A $500 APPLE® GIFT CARD
WHEN YOU DEPOSIT $150K OR MORE

E*TRADE MOBILE PRO



E*TRADE
INVESTING UNLEASHED

ETRADE.COM / 1-800-ETRADE-1

For information and details about this offer, please visit www.etrade.com/giftcard. For new Power E*TRADE customers who open an account and deposit $2,000 from an external account within 60 days. Credit will be provided for up to 500 stock and options trades made within 60 days of the deposited funds clearing in the new account. To receive $500 Apple gift card, customers must deposit $150,000 or more within 45 days of account opening. To receive $200 Apple gift card, customers must deposit between $75,000 and $149,000 within 45 days of account opening. One promotion per customer. E*TRADE reserves the right to terminate this offer at any time.
iPad is trademark of Apple Inc. Apple is not a participant or sponsor of this promotion.
Securities products and services are offered by E*TRADE Securities LLC, Member FINRA/SIPC.
System response and account access times may vary due to a variety of factors, including trading volumes, market conditions, system performance and other factors.
©2010 E*TRADE Financial Corporation. All rights reserved.

1 New York GIANTS

Resuscitating a once dominant defense? Looks like a job for Superman

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 8–8

September
12 Carolina
19 at Indianapolis
26 Tennessee

October
3 Chicago
10 at Houston
17 Detroit
25 at Dallas (M)
31 BYE

November
7 at Seattle
14 Dallas
21 at Philadelphia
28 Jacksonville

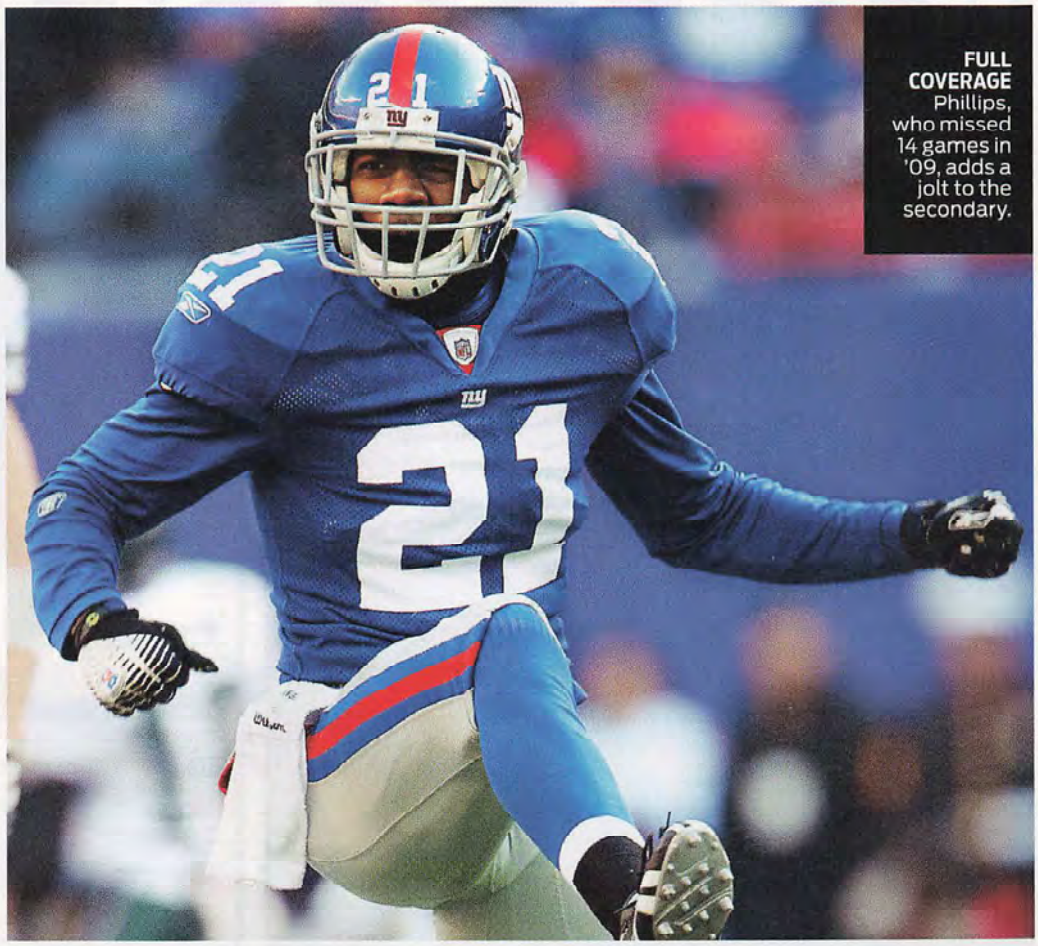
December
5 Washington
12 at Minnesota
19 Philadelphia
26 at Green Bay

January
2 at Washington

(M) Monday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **7**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.527**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The opener at the New Meadowlands offers a chance to avenge last year's demolition by the Panthers in the Giants' closing game at the old place. Like 2009, when New York started 5–0, the easiest part of the schedule comes in the first half of the season—except for Indy in prime time in Week 2. Eli and Peyton Manning have faced each other only once, a 26–21 Colts win in Jersey in 2006.



FULL COVERAGE Phillips, who missed 14 games in '09, adds a jolt to the secondary.

DAVID BERGMAN

WHEN THE details of his recent medical history are accounted for, strong safety Kenny Phillips's nickname sounds almost cruel. Superman shouldn't fall victim to a degenerative knee condition called patellofemoral arthritis; shouldn't slip off in the middle of autumn to visit noted orthopedist Dr. James Andrews for microfracture surgery; shouldn't miss the final 14 games of his sophomore NFL season. So consider it a credit to the 23-year-old Phillips—the player the Giants arguably missed most amid their embarrassing, anticlimactic, injury-marred 2009 campaign—that when his teammates yell, "Superman is back!" on a practice field in Albany one summer day, it doesn't sound like taunting but rather hope.

That was the last emotion the Giants' 2009 season inspired. New York got off to a 5–0 start but collapsed after that as the nicked-up defense—six key contributors missed at least three games; defensive linemen Justin Tuck and Rocky Bernard played the whole season with shoulder injuries—yielded 427 points, second most in team history and the third most in the league. Notably, the Giants also gave up the second-most touchdown passes in the NFL. As if an exclamation point were needed, New York closed the season with a 41–9 blowout loss to the Panthers, who rushed for 247 yards in the Giants' final game at their eponymous stadium, and a 44–7 thrashing by the Vikings, who threw for 358 yards. It left the kind of stink that lingers. "It stays with you

pretty good," coach Tom Coughlin said at the start of camp. "It kind of eats away at you."

While it may seem impossible to identify any one turning point, the loss of the übertalented Phillips, who had two interceptions in his only two games, certainly contributed. "The way Kenny started off last year, there were no limitations to how far he could go," Coughlin says. Drafted 31st overall out of Miami two years ago, the 6' 2", 210-pound Phillips had already developed a reputation, in the words of cornerback Terrell Thomas, for "moving us corners out of the way to take our fade routes." Phillips's nickname derives from his ability to sprint from sideline to sideline and instinctively fly in to shatter a play from out of nowhere—a trait a recovered Phillips featured during 2010 camp. "If Kenny stays healthy," defensive end Justin Tuck says, "in 10 years you'll be talking about one of the top five safeties in the league. He doesn't even know how good he can be."

But Coughlin, who identified safety as the primary position "that needed to be corrected" this off-season, wasn't simply banking on one man's convalescence. Out went defensive coordinator Bill Sheridan after a year, replaced by the loud, attack-oriented Perry Fewell (the Bills' interim coach last season). General manager Jerry Reese then went shopping for veteran swagger, inking former Cardinals free safety Antrel Rolle to a massive, five-year, $37 million deal, and former Seahawks strong safety Deon Grant, who's already taken to motivating teammates with postpractice phone calls. The outspoken Rolle has declared himself and Phillips the best safety pair in the league. "You feel comfortable knowing there are guys back there that got your back," says Tuck. "We can take a lot of risks up front in terms of stunting, blitzes, things that we couldn't have done last year."

Under Fewell, in fact, that front line—arguably the best eight-man rotation in the league—will be doing quite a bit that's seldom been seen before. Fewell has unveiled a turbo quadruple-end pass rush (dubbed NASCAR) featuring Tuck, Osi Umenyiora and two 6' 5" monsters, rookie Jason Pierre-Paul and veteran Mathias Kiwanuka, as well as an anti-run formation (Big Base) that moves 6' 7", 304-pound Chris Canty to end and Kiwanuka to linebacker. Tellingly, Tuck himself has practiced at every line spot, while absurd depth has nudged Umenyiora, a two-time Pro Bowl player, to the second team.

The overarching goal is to leverage a wealth of talent while keeping legs fresh and warding off injury across the board. And though the upside of this defense may be unrivaled in the NFL, Superman's backstory is a reminder of how suddenly things can unravel. "We have all the pieces to the puzzle now," Phillips says, grinning. "And it's been a while, but I'm ready to put on that cape."

—Pablo S. Torre

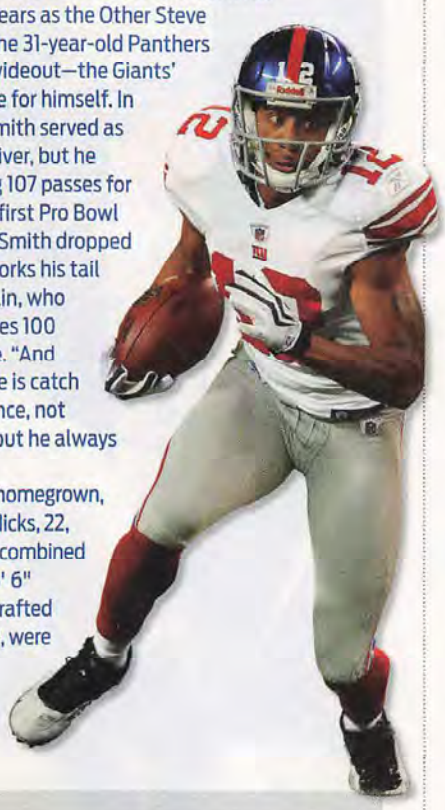
SPOTLIGHT

Steve Smith, Wide receiver

SMITH isn't sure when the metamorphosis happened. Giants cornerback Terrell Thomas, who also played with Smith at USC, likes to point to the win over the Cowboys early last season: a 10-catch, 134-yard opus by the 5' 11" Smith, highlighted by a double move out of the slot that put defender Orlando Scandrick on his butt and set Smith dancing in the end zone. "Then people were like, O.K., this guy's for real," Thomas recalls. Smith himself mostly remembers what people recently started telling him: *"You're the Steve Smith now."*

After toiling for several years as the Other Steve Smith—a lesser version of the 31-year-old Panthers star, another sub-six-foot wideout—the Giants' Smith, 25, has made a name for himself. In his second season, 2008, Smith served as the Giants' third-down receiver, but he exploded last year, catching 107 passes for 1,220 yards and earning his first Pro Bowl nod. (The new Other Steve Smith dropped off to 65 for 982.) "Steve works his tail off," says coach Tom Coughlin, who estimates that Smith catches 100 to 125 balls a day in practice. "And what Steve has always done is catch it. No matter the circumstance, not always the best of throws, but he always finds a way."

But Smith is just one in a homegrown, high-ceiling corps. Hakeem Nicks, 22, and Mario Manningham, 24, combined for 11 scores last year, while 6' 6" Ramses Barden, 24, and undrafted camp surprise Victor Cruz, 23, were impressive in August. "It happened real fast," Smith says. "Now I'm also one of the old guys."



AL TIELEMANS

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **TOM COUGHLIN**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 8

QB **ELI MANNING**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	509	317	62.3
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
4,021	27	14	93.1

RB **BRANDON JACOBS**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
15	224	835	3.7
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
18	184	10.2	6

FB **MADISON HEDGECOCK**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
4	23	5.8	1

WR **STEVE SMITH**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	107	1,220	7

WR **HAKEEM NICKS**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	47	790	6

TE **KEVIN BOSS**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	42	567	5

LT **DAVID DIEHL**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	319

LG **RICH SEUBERT**

G	HT	WT
14	6' 3"	310

C **SHAUN O'HARA**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	303

RG **CHRIS SNEE**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	317

RT **KAREEM McKENZIE**

G	HT	WT
12	6' 6"	327

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 13

DE **JUSTIN TUCK**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	59	6	0

DT **BARRY COFIELD**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	35	1	0

DT **JAY ALFORD***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	15	2½	0

DE **MATHIAS KIWANUKA**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	61	3	0

LB **MICHAEL BOLEY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	84	1	0

LB ***KEITH BULLUCK***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	108	0	3

LB **CLINT SINTIM**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	20	1	0

CB **COREY WEBSTER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	51	0	1

FS ***ANTREL ROLLE***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	72	1½	4

SS **KENNY PHILLIPS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
2	13	0	2

CB **TERRELL THOMAS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	85	1	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P ***MATT DODGE (R)***

PUNTS	AVG	NET
67	45.8	39.6

K **LAWRENCE TYNES**

FG	XP	POINTS
27-32	45-45	126

PR **AARON ROSS**

RET	AVG	TD
0	—	0

KR **DANNY WARE**

RET	AVG	TD
2	18.5	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns *2008 stats

2 Dallas COWBOYS

An explosive, every-down back is needed, and Felix Jones says he's ready

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 11–5

September
12 at Washington
19 Chicago
26 at Houston

October
3 BYE
10 Tennessee
17 at Minnesota
25 N.Y. Giants (M)
31 Jacksonville

November
7 at Green Bay
14 at N.Y. Giants
21 Detroit
25 New Orleans (T)

December
5 at Indianapolis
12 Philadelphia
19 Washington
25 at Arizona (S)

January
2 at Philadelphia

(M) Monday (T) Thursday (S) Saturday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **3**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.543**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
Dallas faces just one playoff team, the Vikings, in the first two months of the season, but then gets last year's Super Bowl participants in back-to-back weeks. Last year the Cowboys had their first winning record in December-January since the 1996 season; they'll need to repeat that feat with three division opponents in their last four games.



BULK MOVER The speedy Jones added more than 10 pounds of muscle in the off-season.

BOB ROSATO

WHEN THE Cowboys drafted Felix Jones and Tashard Choice to round out their backfield in 2008, their running game seemed perfectly balanced. Jones, the 207-pound whirling dervish from Arkansas, would be the home run threat that 215-pound between-the-tackles back Marion Barber was not, and Choice would provide a receiving threat, as well as all-around depth.

In the two years since, something very big has happened. Literally. Jones, tired of taking a beating (he missed 12 of his first 32 NFL games due to injury), bulked up to 220 pounds during this off-season. Surprisingly, he's now even bigger than Barber. And the Cowboys want to expand his role in the offense if he can stay healthy. It's no wonder they want him to touch the ball more—among all NFL backs who carried the ball more than 15 times last season, none averaged more per carry than Jones's 5.9 yards.

It seemed odd during training camp to see a lightning-quick back bordering on blocking-back size. But the new-model Jones looked good—sculpted and much more solid—while appearing to retain the quickness that makes him so valuable. "I spent a lot of time in the weight room this year, working on my upper-body strength and power," Jones says. "I want to be able to give out more punishment than the defense gives to me, and it hasn't been that way so far in the NFL. But I want to do that without losing any of my speed. Overall, I want to be a more explosive back."

It seems reasonable to expect that if Jones stays in one piece and plays all 16 games this season, he could carry the ball almost twice as much as Barber. (In 2009, Barber had 214 carries to Jones's 116.) Dallas would like to run more and bleed the clock; last year the Cowboys ran the ball 436 times (43% of their offensive snaps). Their goal this season is to decrease the number of plays in which quarterback Tony Romo is exposed to injury. He threw, ran or was sacked on 619 offensive snaps in '09. Offensive coordinator Jason Garrett wouldn't mind if Romo's total touches got slashed to 550.

Jones has averaged just 7.3 carries a game in his first two seasons. To think he can run the ball 15 to 20 times a game is a huge leap of faith for the Cowboys. But Dallas wants to see if Jones and his quickness can give the offense a four-quarter dimension that it hasn't had in years—maybe since Tony Dorsett left town 22 years ago.

"Every football player wants to play, but I'm not going to demand 20 carries," says Jones, a quiet kid from Tulsa—indeed, it's hard to imagine him demanding anything. "I'm willing and ready to carry a heavy load, but I just want to work within the team to be the player they need me to be. We've got a real tight group at running back; no one's demanding anything. We help each other get better. Today, Tashard saw me make a mistake in my blocking technique, and he came over right away and corrected it. So we're not going to have a problem with who gets the ball."

Training camp, of course, has never been Jones's problem. As hard as he worked in the offseason to get stronger, he also wanted to ensure that he makes it through a full campaign. "I've had those nagging injuries that bothered me," he says. "That can't continue to happen."

Jones grew up a Cowboys fan in Tulsa and was, naturally, an Emmitt Smith fan. When Jones actually got the chance to meet Smith at a practice during his rookie season, he found himself awestruck. Smith gave Jones some instruction on how to meet a linebacker head-on and block him, but Jones doesn't remember what he said. "I was in shock," he says. "It's amazing that sometimes, when Emmitt's around, he'll come up and give me some advice about the position or how to run. I still act like a little kid when I'm around him."

But the time to be a fan is over, and the time has come to produce as a playoff-team running back. There is the little matter of Super Bowl XLV being held at Cowboys Stadium this year. No team has ever played the championship game on its own field.

"Playing the Super Bowl at home is the kind of pressure we appreciate," Jones says. In Dallas it's the kind of pressure that never goes away. —P.K.

KYLE TERADA/US PRESSWIRE

SPOTLIGHT

Doug Free, Left tackle

FLOZELL ADAMS, who was cut loose in the off-season, missed only 10 starts at left tackle in the last 11 years for the Cowboys. And even though his mobility had declined significantly in recent years, there's certainly some risk in handing the job to Free, a backup at right tackle in 2009 until he took over for starter Marc Colombo when the latter went down with a broken leg last November. Dallas's fourth-round pick in '07, Free last played left tackle in '06, as a senior at Northern Illinois. But starting 46 games on the left side in places like Bowling Green, Ohio and Kalamazoo, Mich., is one thing. Starting at FedEx Field on national TV in Week 1 is another. And bouts with the Bears' Julius Peppers and the Texans' Mario Williams in Weeks 2 and 3 will be major tests. The only thing at stake in the Cowboys' decision to hand him the job, of course, is the blind side of franchise quarterback Tony Romo.



"I try not to think about the pressure," Free said as Dallas camp broke last week. "The way I look at it is, I played left tackle a lot in college, and it's a position that's very familiar to me. I focus on the fundamentals of the job and what I have to do to succeed."

By all accounts he did well in training camp, showing better lateral quickness and more athleticism than the worn-down Adams. "He's going to be fine," Romo says. "I'm not just saying this because he's going to be there and [so] I have to. I really like what I've seen. I'm comfortable with him there." Without a quality backup to Free, Romo's got little choice.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **WADE PHILLIPS**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 2

QB TONY ROMO

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	550	347	63.1
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
4,483	26	9	97.6

RB MARION BARBER III

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
15	214	932	4.4
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
26	221	8.5	7

FB DEON ANDERSON

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
1	5	5.0	0

WR MILES AUSTIN

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	81	1,320	11

WR ROY WILLIAMS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	38	596	7

TE JASON WITTEN

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	94	1,030	2

LT DOUG FREE

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	320

LG KYLE KOSIER

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	309

C ANDRE GURODE

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	318

RG LEONARD DAVIS

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	355

RT MARC COLOMBO

G	HT	WT
9	6' 8"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 9

DE MARCUS SPEARS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	25	2½	0

NT JAY RATLIFF

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	40	6	0

DE IGOR OLSHANSKY

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	40	1½	0

LB ANTHONY SPENCER

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	67	6	1

LB BRADIE JAMES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	113	2	0

LB KEITH BROOKING

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	106	3	0

LB DeMARCUS WARE

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	57	11	0

CB TERENCE NEWMAN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	57	0	3

FS ALAN BALL

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	31	0	0

SS GERALD SENSABAUGH

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	66	0	1

CB MIKE JENKINS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	49	0	5

SPECIAL TEAMS

P MAT McBRIAR

PUNTS	AVG	NET
72	45.1	39.9

K DAVID BUEHLER

FG	XP	POINTS
0–0	0–0	0

PR *AKWASI OWUSU-ANSAH (R)*

RET	AVG	TD
22	12.5	3

KR *AKWASI OWUSU-ANSAH (R)*

RET	AVG	TD
16	29.7	2

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Philadelphia EAGLES

New quarterback, new feature back and a new commitment to toughness

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 11–5

September
12 Green Bay
19 at Detroit
26 at Jacksonville

October
3 Washington
10 at San Francisco
17 Atlanta
24 at Tennessee
31 BYE

November
7 Indianapolis
15 at Washington (M)
21 N.Y. Giants
28 at Chicago

December
2 Houston (T)
12 at Dallas
19 at N.Y. Giants
26 Minnesota

January
2 Dallas

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **9**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.520**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
Donovan McNabb's return to Philly in Week 4 is the early highlight, and Andy Reid's 11–0 mark after a bye will be tested in Week 9 against the AFC champion Colts. But it's a tough four-game closing run that will likely determine Philly's playoff chances. Dallas's 24–0 smackdown of the Eagles in Week 17 last year debunked the notion that Philly had a late-season advantage over its bitter rival.



FIGHTING VEHICLE Bradley (55) has returned from injury—and returned to dishing out hits.

ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

When weakside linebacker Ernie Sims walked through the door of the Eagles' facility on April 20, the day after the Lions traded him to Philadelphia as part of a three-way deal with the Broncos, he had no idea he would be greeted by his future next-door neighbor. Sims didn't know much about his new team, let alone the tousle-haired middle linebacker he'd be playing alongside. But there to welcome the 6-foot, 230-pound Sims was Stewart Bradley: a year older than Sims, at 26, not to mention four inches taller and nearly 30 pounds heavier. "Stew approached me, excited to have me play next to him," Sims recalls. Why? "Me and Stew," Sims soon learned, "understand that hitting is the main part of football. And we like that."

Evidently. Eagles camp in Bethlehem, Pa., proved notable this summer for many things: the dawn of the Kevin Kolb era at quarterback, the emergence of second-year LeSean McCoy as the team's all-purpose tailback and, not least, the recurring crashing sounds orchestrated by Bradley and Sims, soulmates operating at the heart of defensive coordinator Sean McDermott's 4–3 scheme. Bradley, Sims discovered, was the undisputed

leader on the defense, a heartthrob among fans and one of the most talented players in the NFL, physically and mentally. Sims, Bradley found, was a hungry, quick and cold-blooded tackler—who also happened to need a new place to live. "So Ernie got an apartment right next to mine," Bradley says. They now share a locker wall, a block in Philadelphia (near South Street) and a taste for plastic-on-plastic violence that has teammates turning—and minding—their heads.

"I'm loving it," says strong safety Quintin Mikell. "We all know coming on the field that we're not going to be the biggest guys out there defensively. If we go 100 miles an hour, we might make a mistake, but at least somebody's going to get hit."

Just ask backup tailback Eldra Buckley. On one August morning he was nailed twice by Bradley during live practice, provoking playground-level *oohs*. Then, four days later, Sims jacked Buckley up on a would-be screen . . . during a noncontact passing drill. Protests by offensive linemen and a whooping celebration by cornerback (and unflinching defensive partisan) Asante Samuel followed. "Ernie and I push each other," Bradley says. "If he gets a big hit, I'm looking for a big hit."

Last season, Philly's linebackers were known less for doling out pain than for suffering it. Not one of them started all 16 games. Notably, Bradley, who'd turned in a stellar season in 2008, missed the entire year after shredding his right ACL while entangled in a pile during Flight Night, the team's annual training camp open scrimmage. Then, nearly three months later, Bradley's replacement, Omar Gaither, was lost for the season with a Lisfranc sprain that required surgery. Attempts to replace him with a combo platter of five players, including former Philly linchpin Jeremiah Trotter, failed miserably. Amid all the disorder, opposing tight ends had their way over the middle. "Having Stew back," McDermott summarizes, "means a lot."

But none of it will mean much without the right arm of Kolb, upon whom coach Andy Reid has staked his offensive fortunes following the trading of Donovan McNabb to the Redskins. Kolb, 26, struggled at the start of camp but went on to find his groove, buoyed by a skill-position corps with as much youth and talent as any in the NFL. Speedy wideouts DeSean Jackson and Jeremy Maclin are just 23 and 22, respectively; tight end Brent Celek, who exploded for 971 yards and eight touchdowns last year, is 25; and McCoy is 22. Then there are the Eagles' 13 draft picks from April. "God, we got a brand-new team," says defensive end Trent Cole. "I got about 60 percent of the guys' names down."

One particular lesson that 2010 camp drilled into this offense? "You've gotta be a different cat to play defense," backup tight end Cornelius Ingram says, laughing. "Especially linebacker. Especially here." —P.S.T.

AL TIELEMANS

SPOTLIGHT

LeSean McCoy, Running back

FOR ALL the hand-wringing over the exodus of Donovan McNabb, the Eagles have to come to terms with another significant departure: Running back Brian Westbrook, a mainstay in Philadelphia for eight seasons, was released last February. (The 49ers picked him up in August.) "I thought that for several years Brian might have been the player most important to any team in the league," offensive coordinator Marty Mornhinweg says. "We asked him to be one of the very best runners; we asked him to run routes and catch the football like a receiver; we asked him to pick up protection; and on occasion we asked him to run-block."

Into that Swiss Army–knife role steps the 22-year-old McCoy, who brings just two seasons of college experience (at Pittsburgh) and one in the NFL (gaining 4.1 yards per rush in backing up, and ultimately supplanting, Westbrook in 2009). The versatile—and confident—McCoy says he's ready to step into those shoes; reality suggests that, despite a 5' 10", 208-pound frame very similar to his predecessor's, he can't possibly duplicate Westbrook in his prime. But the playbook will change very little, coaches say; in camp, practices incorporated the same swing passes and screens that have long been staples of Philly's offense. McCoy has soft hands and, according to Mornhinweg, is "180 degrees" from where he was last season in his understanding of the offense. McCoy knows his assignments and responsibilities on leaving the huddle and isn't wasting time trying to remember the playbook.

All he has to do now, Mornhinweg says, is "virtually everything possible in football." Just as Westbrook did for nearly a decade.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **ANDY REID**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 11

QB **KEVIN KOLB**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
5	96	62	64.6
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
741	4	3	88.9

RB **LeSEAN McCOY**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	155	637	4.1
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
40	308	7.7	4

FB **LEONARD WEAVER**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	70	323	4.6
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
15	140	9.3	4

WR **DeSEAN JACKSON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	62	1,156	10

WR **JEREMY MACLIN**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	56	773	4

TE **BRENT CELEK**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	76	971	8

LT **JASON PETERS**

G	HT	WT
15	6' 4"	340

LG **TODD HERREMANS**

G	HT	WT
11	6' 6"	321

C **JAMAAL JACKSON**

G	HT	WT
15	6' 4"	330

RG **STACY ANDREWS**

G	HT	WT
10	6' 7"	340

RT **WINSTON JUSTICE**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 12

DE ***BRANDON GRAHAM (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	64	10½	0

DT **MIKE PATTERSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	55	1½	0

DT **BRODRICK BUNKLEY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	37	1	0

DE **TRENT COLE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	57	12½	0

LB ***ERNIE SIMS***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	49	0	0

LB **STEWART BRADLEY***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	108	1	1

LB **AKEEM JORDAN**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	71	1	2

CB **ASANTE SAMUEL**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	40	0	9

FS ***NATE ALLEN (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	85	0	4

SS **QUINTIN MIKELL**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	69	0	2

CB **ELLIS HOBBS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
8	11	0	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **SAV ROCCA**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
76	42.4	38.3

K **DAVID AKERS**

FG	XP	POINTS
32-37	43-45	139

PR **DeSEAN JACKSON**

RET	AVG	TD
29	15.2	2

KR **ELLIS HOBBS**

RET	AVG	TD
20	24.1	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns *2008 stats

4 Washington REDSKINS

Mike Shanahan arrives to, ahem, adjust some attitudes in D.C.

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 4–12

September
12 Dallas
19 Houston
26 at St. Louis

October
3 at Philadelphia
10 Green Bay
17 Indianapolis
24 at Chicago
31 at Detroit

November
7 BYE
15 Philadelphia (M)
21 at Tennessee
28 Minnesota

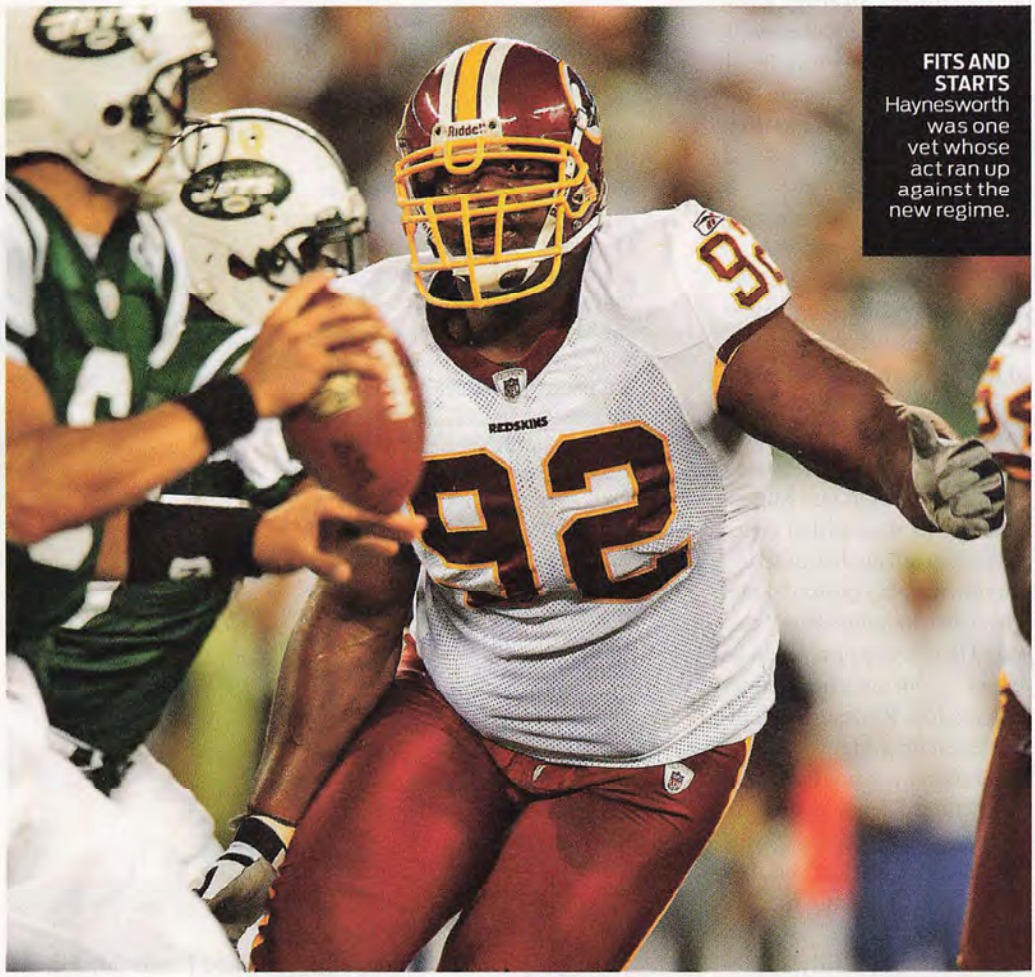
December
5 at N.Y. Giants
12 Tampa Bay
19 at Dallas
26 at Jacksonville

January
2 N.Y. Giants

(M) Monday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **8**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.523**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
On the plus side the Skins' toughest nondivisional foes—the Colts, Packers and Vikings—are coming to D.C., and Donovan McNabb will face only two teams, Green Bay and Tampa Bay, in the top 10 against the pass in 2009. But Washington's own pass D faces a murderers' row of QBs early: Tony Romo, Matt Schaub, Aaron Rodgers and Peyton Manning.



FITS AND STARTS Haynesworth was one vet whose act ran up against the new regime.

DAVID BERGMAN

HIS FACE baked by the Virginia sun, Mike Shanahan was walking to practice at the team's facility in Ashburn at 8:20 one morning when he heard fans hailing the Redskins' new regime. But the Skins' coach did not wave to his constituency. He did not crack a smile. Instead—and in marked contrast to new general manager Bruce Allen, who moonlighted this off-season giving one stump speech after another to potential season-ticket holders—Shanahan simply grimaced, especially at the loudest chant: "Give 'em hell, Mike!" As if anyone had to tell him.

The former Broncos coach, who also wields final say on personnel matters in Washington, had set a merciless tone back in March, cutting 72 years' worth of experience in what Allen deemed "a day of change." Among the 10 departed were seven players 30 or older (from defensive tackle Cornelius Griffin to cornerback Fred Smoot) and even a team captain (tailback Rock Cartwright). Then, as if there was any doubt that the page had been permanently turned, the Skins brought in 27 newly signed free agents. As Shanahan says, "We don't really care what guys have done in the past. It's what they do out here."

And, in one famous case, what they do not do. While the face of the new Redskins is assuredly that of quarterback Donovan McNabb—the team traded two draft picks, a second-rounder in



© 2010 NFL Properties LLC. Team names/logos/indicia are trademarks of the teams indicated. All other NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League.
NFL PLAYERS is a trademark of National Football League Players Incorporated.
NFL PLAYERS

2010 and a third or fourth in '11, to the Eagles for the veteran on Easter Sunday—the spotlight burns most hotly on the biggest holdover from the miserable Jim Zorn era. Before he'd even set foot in camp, former Pro Bowl defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth, who had notably accepted a $21 million bonus on April 1, refused a switch to nosetackle in the team's new 3–4 scheme; demanded a trade; didn't show up to off-season workouts; and thereby felt Shanahan's hellfire upon arrival. Told to pass a conditioning test involving two 300-yard shuttle runs before he could even start practicing, an openly petulant Haynesworth took 10 days before he finally ran the drill and met the necessary times for his position. Said Shanahan at the time, "He probably doesn't like me very much right now, but I'm not here to be liked."

Indeed, boot-camp accountability, previously unheard of along the Beltway, was exactly what the organization had sought in hiring Shanahan. But he's not only monitoring on-field performance: On the very first day of camp, Shanahan laid out his expectations for keeping the locker room clean and treating building employees with respect. He then explained his strict system of fines, the same one he'd instituted to great efficiency in Denver. (A missed practice, for example, will cost you $9,000.) "In the past," safety Reed Doughty says, "a player would maybe say, 'Well, I broke [a rule], but can I have a break?' Now it's simple for everyone: You follow the rules or you don't."

"We realize we were 4–12 last year," Allen adds. "We were 0–6 in our division. We've been honest about where we've stood from the beginning, and we've been honest with the players about having to correct that."

SPOTLIGHT

London Fletcher, Linebacker

IF PRO BOWL berths are any indication, NFL minds still do not appreciate Fletcher's skill set. After 12 years in which he has displayed a field intellect to rival any middle linebacker in the league (including Ray Lewis), the Redskins' captain made his first Pro Bowl only last season, and then only because the first choice, New Orleans's Jonathan Vilma, pulled out when the Saints reached the Super Bowl. But Fletcher brings far more than good intangibles: He was the NFL's second-leading tackler in 2009, with 142, marking his 10th straight season with more than 100 tackles. Echoing the sentiments of many, tight end Chris Cooley says, "London Fletcher is probably the most underrated defensive player in the league."

But in a locker room never short on controversy, the veteran 'backer's role as de facto Redskins ombudsman might be just as critical. Fletcher, 35, lent critical support to Mike Shanahan's switch to a 3–4 defense back in June. The 5' 10", 245-pound fire hydrant called out Albert Haynesworth for skipping workouts and fighting a potential switch to nosetackle. (Fletcher's message: "Stop being selfish.")

"If you can walk it, you can talk it," wideout Santana Moss says. "And London walks it every day." Moss actually isn't kidding: Fletcher has never missed an NFL game. And while some may wonder whether his skills can remain effective for much longer, his teammates, at least, know better than to even ask.



Accordingly, few on the depth chart were safe. Tailback remained stunningly unsettled, with Clinton Portis, Larry Johnson, Willie Parker and Ryan Torain all vying for roster spots. The team's weakest unit, wide receiver, saw 38-year-old Joey Galloway surprisingly grab a starting job. And the defense will turn from the 4–3 to the blitz-happy 3–4 under still another Shanahan addition, defensive coordinator Jim Haslett. With or without a happy Haynesworth (who said he's content now with his nosetackle role) the defense—ranked No. 10 in the NFL last year but dead-last in takeaways—will be formidable, with two converted defensive ends who look to replicate last year's lofty sack totals as linebackers: Brian Orakpo and Andre Carter, who each had 11 quarterback takedowns in '09.

Will all of Shanahan's engineering—and attitude adjustment—be enough to wrest control of the stacked NFC East? Not likely. But given the bar set by the coach's predecessors, this team already has one victory in hand: It will definitely be different. —P.S.T.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MIKE SHANAHAN**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 22

QB	***DONOVAN McNABB***	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		14	443	267	60.3
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		3,553	22	10	92.9
RB	**CLINTON PORTIS**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		8	124	494	4.0
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		9	57	6.3	2
FB	**MIKE SELLERS**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		15	0	0	–
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		17	176	10.4	2
WR	**SANTANA MOSS**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	70	902	3
WR	**JOEY GALLOWAY**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		3	7	67	0
TE	**CHRIS COOLEY**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		7	29	332	2
LT	***TRENT WILLIAMS (R)***	G	HT	WT	
		12	6' 5"	315	
LG	**DERRICK DOCKERY**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 6"	325	
C	**CASEY RABACH**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	288	
RG	***ARTIS HICKS***	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	314	
RT	***JAMMAL BROWN***	G	HT	WT	
		0	6' 6"	313	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 10

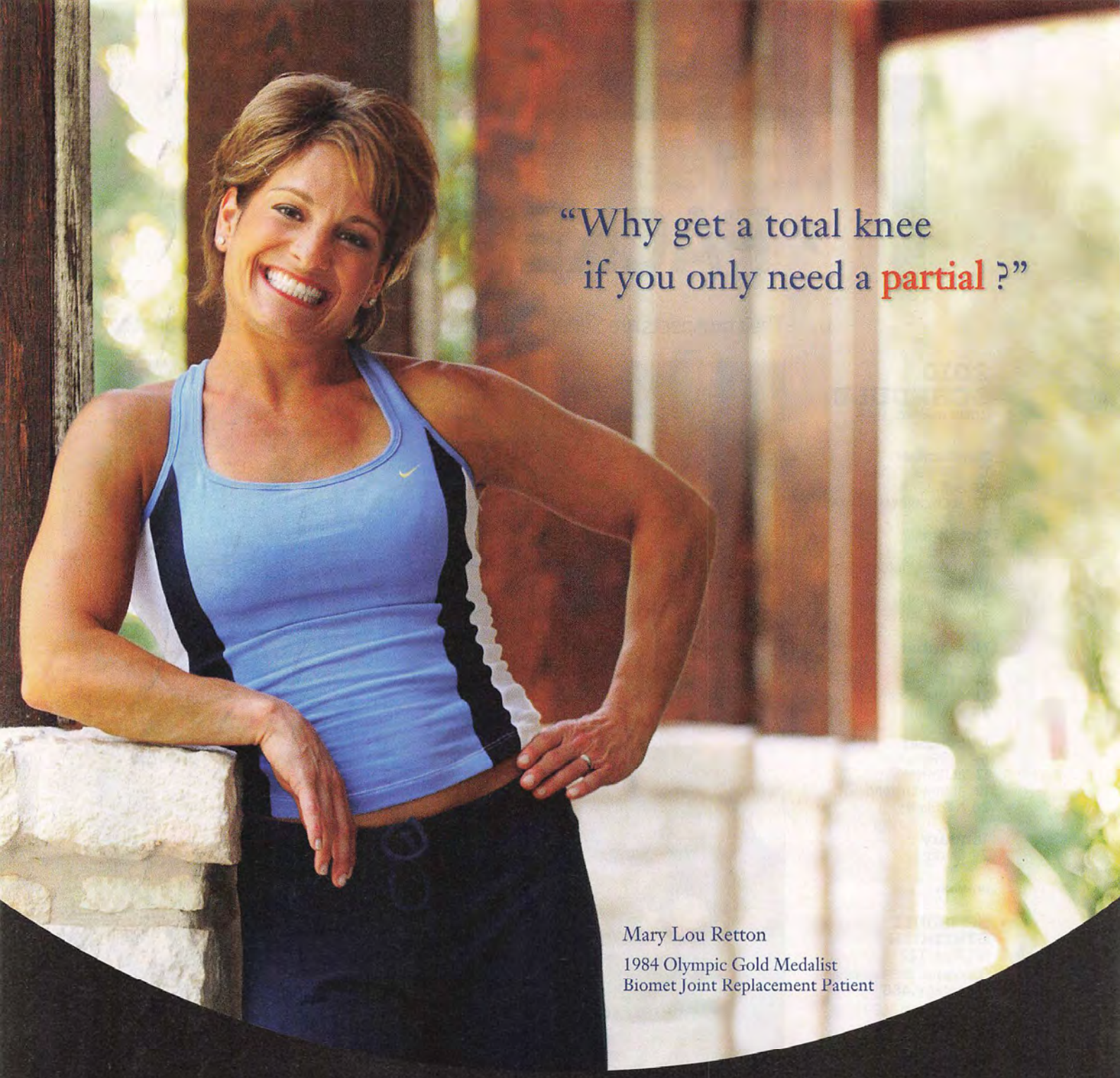
DE	**PHILLIP DANIELS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	35	1	0
NT	**ALBERT HAYNESWORTH**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		12	37	4	0
DE	**KEDRIC GOLSTON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	34	2	0
LB	**BRIAN ORAKPO**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	50	11	0
LB	**LONDON FLETCHER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	142	2	1
LB	**ROCKY McINTOSH**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	94	0	2
LB	**ANDRE CARTER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	62	11	0
CB	**CARLOS ROGERS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	39	0	0
FS	**REED DOUGHTY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	91	2	1
SS	**LARON LANDRY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	90	1	1
CB	**DeANGELO HALL**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		13	58	0	4

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	***JOSH BIDWELL****	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		77	44.5	37.6
K	**GRAHAM GANO**	FG	XP	POINTS
		4–4	6–7	18
PR	***PHILLIP BUCHANON***	RET	AVG	TD
		4	8.5	0
KR	**DEVIN THOMAS**	RET	AVG	TD
		20	22.0	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns *2008 stats

LARRY FRENCH/GETTY IMAGES



Now there's an alternative to total knee replacement. The Oxford® Partial Knee from Biomet. It's the only one of its kind in the United States. The Oxford® Partial Knee lets you keep up to 75% of your healthy knee — for a more rapid recovery with less post-operative pain and more natural motion. Why get a total knee when maybe all you need is a partial knee from Biomet? To learn more, or to find an Oxford® Knee trained surgeon in your area, call or visit our website.

Ask your doctor about the Oxford® Partial Knee.

oxfordknee.com | 800.581.8169 BIOMET®

Not all patients are candidates for partial knee replacement. Only your orthopedic surgeon can tell you if you're a candidate for joint replacement surgery, and if so, which implant is right for your specific needs. You should discuss your condition and treatment options with your surgeon. The Oxford® Meniscal Partial Knee is intended for use in individuals with osteoarthritis or avascular necrosis limited to the medial compartment of the knee and is intended to be implanted with bone cement. Potential risks include, but are not limited to, loosening, dislocation, fracture, wear, and infection, any of which can require additional surgery. For additional information on the Oxford® knee, including risks and warnings, talk to your surgeon and visit Biomet.com. © 2008 Biomet Orthopedics, Inc.

1 Green Bay PACKERS

Their prospects are Super—if they can see their former icon as just another QB

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 11–5

September
12 at Philadelphia
19 Buffalo
27 at Chicago (M)

October
3 Detroit
10 at Washington
17 Miami
24 Minnesota
31 at N.Y. Jets

November
7 Dallas
14 BYE
21 at Minnesota
28 at Atlanta

December
5 San Francisco
12 at Detroit
19 at New England
26 N.Y. Giants

January
2 Chicago

(M) Monday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T22**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.488**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **6**

ANALYSIS
Three Sunday-nighters—versus the Vikes and the Cowboys at home and against the Pats in Foxborough—speak to the lofty expectations surrounding the Packers, and to their marquee opposition. Overall, though, Green Bay has the weakest slate in the division. A stretch of four road games in five weeks will be tough, but the Packers close with two at Lambeau, where they have an icy edge.



GREEN AND GOLD RUSH Grant & Co. look to ride last year's strong finish to a hot start in 2010.

BOB ROSATO

AFTER THE Packers were swept by the Vikings in two emotionally charged games last season, Green Bay quarterback Aaron Rodgers came away thinking the team had been too distracted by his predecessor, Brett Favre.

"The guys in the locker room did a good job staying focused, but there were people in the organization that didn't treat it as another game, when it was another game," Rodgers says. "I think we put too much emphasis on those two."

Says coach Mike McCarthy, "If [Aaron] felt it, then obviously it existed. I probably had them too high for that [first] game. I didn't feel that in the second game—maybe outside the building, [with Favre] coming back to Lambeau with all the buildup—but I'd agree with that going into the first game."

Had the Packers won either of those Minnesota matchups, they would have hosted a divisional playoff game as NFC North champions instead of hitting the road as a wild card. In the latter role they lost a 51–45 overtime crusher in Arizona—"hardest loss I've ever

had," says running back Ryan Grant. In many ways the Packers were two teams last season: the one that started 4–4 and dropped two to the Vikes, and the one that finished 7–1 and looked like a world-beater.

Part of last season's sluggish start can be linked to the defense's switch from a 4–3 to a 3–4 scheme. Expect a quicker start in 2010 with another year of coordinator Dom Capers's system under the players' belts. "We tried to come out fast and furious as an offense early in [2009] to give our defense time to develop, and the sacks just killed us," McCarthy says. "We had so many negative plays. Once we got that corrected, we did some great things on offense, and the defense came around and played good football. Last year was a learning experience that you can draw from, the positive and the negative. [But] this is a new team."

Green Bay's strong finishing kick has created a Super Bowl aura around the team for 2010, but a few questions remain. Will the offensive line, which gave up 51 sacks, hold up? Can the secondary, with Charles Woodson (age 33) and Al Harris (35) at the corners, stay healthy? Can the Pack overcome its Favre complex?

Green Bay was typically quiet in the off-season, keeping its core mostly intact, shying away from the free-agent market and adding pieces through the draft. First-round pick Bryan Bulaga, an offensive tackle from Iowa, had such a terrific training camp and preseason that he was pushing for a starting job at left guard. The next two picks, defensive end Mike Neal out of Purdue and safety Morgan Burnett from Georgia Tech, are also expected to contribute, with Burnett slated to begin the season as a starter in place of the injured Atari Bigby. Finding young talent and getting it on the field has been Green Bay's dominant philosophy under McCarthy and general manager Ted Thompson.

"We are a draft-and-develop team," McCarthy says. "It doesn't mean we don't ever want to go out into free agency, but we feel if we're drafting and developing them the right way, our team will improve."

Rodgers, 26, is the prime example of the Packer Way: He slipped to No. 24 in the 2005 draft and is now an elite player in this golden age of quarterbacks. In his two years as a starter Rodgers has thrown for 8,472 yards, with 58 touchdowns and 20 interceptions. "He's in total control of our offense," McCarthy says. "We've given him all the responsibilities. There hasn't been a quarterback that I've coached or coordinated that has as much responsibility as he does."

McCarthy, of course, used to coach Favre. For the Pack, winning the NFC North and starting a Super Bowl run may come down to how they fare against him. —*Damon Hack*

SPOTLIGHT

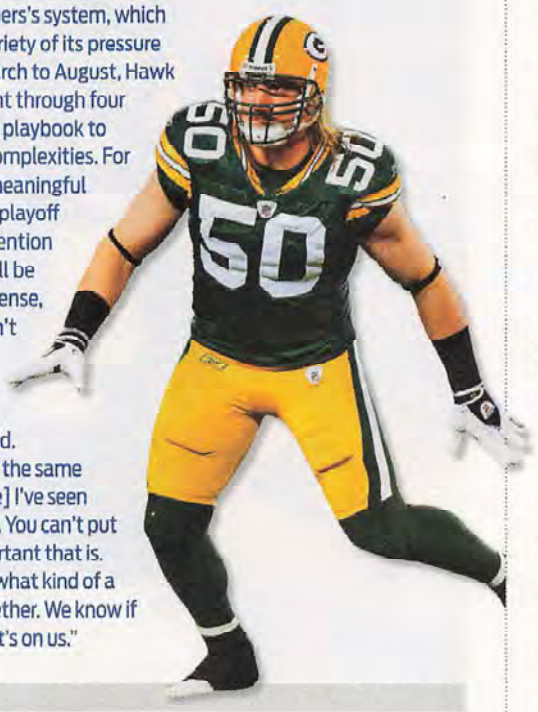
A.J. Hawk, Linebacker

IN 2006, Hawk made the All-Rookie team, with 120 tackles, 3½ sacks and two interceptions from an outside linebacker spot. In the three years since he has been unable to exceed any of those numbers. In moving to the inside in 2009—his first season in coordinator Dom Capers's 3–4 scheme—Hawk had only 89 tackles and one sack for the league's second-ranked defense. Asked to assess his season, Hawk, 26, says, "I think it was just like our defense as a whole—at times able to make plays and at times not as consistent."

There are reasons to believe Hawk is headed for a turnaround. The first: Packers coach Mike McCarthy believes that Hawk has been having his best camp as a pro. "I've liked his approach," McCarthy says. "His conditioning is at the highest level. He's always been a highly conditioned athlete, and I think he's taken it to another level this year. He's been very productive out here."

Another reason: The 6' 2", 247-pound Hawk will be more accustomed to Capers's system, which is known for the variety of its pressure packages. From March to August, Hawk says Green Bay went through four installations of the playbook to better master its complexities. For a unit whose last meaningful game was a 51–45 playoff loss at Arizona, attention to detail in 2010 will be essential. "As a defense, we know that wasn't us," Hawk says of the unit that allowed the Cardinals to run wild.

"I look at a lot of the same faces [in the huddle] I've seen since I've been here. You can't put a stat on how important that is. We're trying to see what kind of a run we can put together. We know if we're not winning, it's on us."



JOHN BIEVER

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MIKE McCARTHY**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 6

QB AARON RODGERS

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
16	541	350	64.7
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
4,434	30	7	103.2

RB RYAN GRANT

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	282	1,253	4.4
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
25	197	7.9	11

FB JOHN KUHN

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	8	18	2.3
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
7	47	6.7	3

WR GREG JENNINGS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	68	1,113	4

WR DONALD DRIVER

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	70	1,061	6

TE JERMICHAEL FINLEY

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
13	55	676	5

LT CHAD CLIFTON

G	HT	WT
12	6' 5"	320

LG DARYN COLLEDGE

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	308

C SCOTT WELLS

G	HT	WT
15	6' 2"	300

RG JOSH SITTON

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	318

RT MARK TAUSCHER

G	HT	WT
8	6' 3"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 2

DE RYAN PICKETT

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	33	0	0

NT B.J. RAJI

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	25	1	0

DE CULLEN JENKINS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	32	4½	1

LB BRAD JONES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	33	4	0

LB A.J. HAWK

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	89	1	2

LB NICK BARNETT

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	105	4	0

LB CLAY MATTHEWS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	51	10	0

CB CHARLES WOODSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	74	2	9

FS NICK COLLINS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	53	1	6

SS ATARI BIGBY

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	49	0	4

CB AL HARRIS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	34	1	2

SPECIAL TEAMS

P *TIM MASTHAY

PUNTS	AVG	NET
53	45.2	N/A

K MASON CROSBY

FG	XP	POINTS
27-36	48-49	129

PR WILL BLACKMON

RET	AVG	TD
3	3.7	0

KR WILL BLACKMON

RET	AVG	TD
10	23.3	0

New acquisition
**2008 college stats*
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 Minnesota VIKINGS

The Man returns, but will he have the weapons to repeat last year's magic?

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 12–4

September
9 at New Orleans (T)
19 Miami
26 Detroit

October
3 BYE
11 at N.Y. Jets (M)
17 Dallas
24 at Green Bay
31 at New England

November
7 Arizona
14 at Chicago
21 Green Bay
28 at Washington

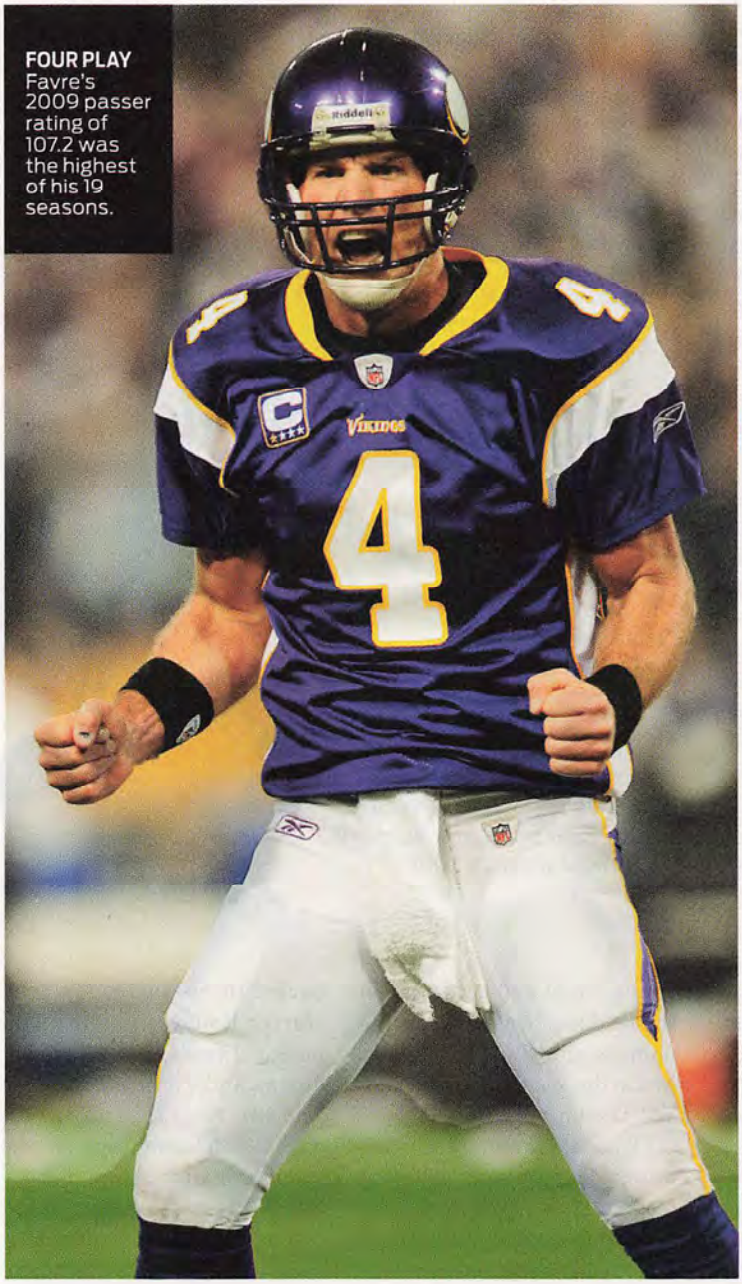
December
5 Buffalo l
12 N.Y. Giants
20 Chicago (M)
26 at Philadelphia

January
2 at Detroit

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T14**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.504**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
It's drama from the get-go as the Vikes kick off with a rematch of the NFC title game, leaving Brett Favre little time to round into shape. Another playoff rematch, against the Cowboys, comes in Week 6, followed by Favre's return to Lambeau and a third road game in four weeks, against Tom Brady's Pats. Three home games from Weeks 13 through 15 will help as Minnesota jockeys for playoff position.



FOUR PLAY Favre's 2009 passer rating of 107.2 was the highest of his 19 seasons.

JOHN BIEVER

ONE YEAR after leading the Vikings to the NFC Championship Game in his 19th season, Brett Favre surprised almost no one in returning for a 20th. It did take all manner of pomp and circumstance to finally get him to the Vikings' facility—a clandestine meeting with three teammates in Hattiesburg, Miss., a private jet, a slow-speed car chase—but the Vikings ultimately got their man.

"The leadership he brings elevates the entire building," says Vikings defensive end Jared Allen, who joined guard Steve Hutchinson and kicker Ryan Longwell on what might be called Operation Arm Twist, the mission to Hattiesburg on Aug. 17. "He excites everybody that has anything to do with football. He's back, and let's go try and win a championship."

Brad Childress, the Vikings' coach, put the unique pursuit of the quarterback icon this way: "It wasn't me wanting him back. *We* wanted him back."

Like last year, the courting of Favre was flashy but messy, with quarterbacks Tarvaris Jackson and Sage Rosenfels once again booted to the sideline weeks before the season opener while Favre missed another training camp. A 6–0 start smoothed over bruised feelings in the locker room a year ago, and another quick start this season would likely do the same.

But the Vikings' road to the Super Bowl already looks more difficult, and not just because of what could be a killer October (at Jets, Dallas, at Green Bay, at New England). As Favre was

riding into town, his receiving corps was taking two huge hits. Sidney Rice, who last season caught 83 passes for 1,312 yards and eight touchdowns, underwent hip surgery in August and could miss the first half of the season. And during Favre's first practice, second-year speedster Percy Harvin, who has been battling migraine headaches, was taken away in an ambulance after collapsing on the field. (While Harvin returned to practice the following week, the Vikings quickly signed Favre's former Green Bay teammate, receiver Javon Walker, for much-needed depth.) The Vikings also lost versatile third-down back Chester Taylor, who took his pass-catching ability and penchant for blitz pickup to Chicago as a free agent.

Beyond the hoopla of Favre's return, the question the Vikings will have to answer is, Can a 40-year-old quarterback who's coming off ankle surgery lead Minnesota to its first Super Bowl title? "People are going to break it down and say this is wrong, this is right, this is inspirational, this is whatever," Favre said. "Everyone is going to have their take on it."

Said Childress, "As [Favre] told the team, he's here for one reason and one reason only. You can say we're pushing it all into the middle of the table, but we do that every year. We feel like we have a good football team. We've got to be able to back it up."

Minnesota's defense should help. To the best front four in the NFL—Allen, Pat Williams, Kevin Williams, Ray Edwards—the Vikings added depth at defensive end in fourth-round pick Everson Griffen, who should find himself in the pass-rushing rotation as a rookie. The Vikes also brought in cornerback help, drafting Chris Cook in the second round and signing free-agent Lito Sheppard because of uncertainty about starter Cedric Griffin, who tore his ACL in the conference championship game.

Defensive coordinator Leslie Frazier, for one, isn't putting Minnesota's success or failure entirely on Favre. "If our defense improves, it should put us another step closer to winning a championship," he said of the unit that finished sixth in total defense last year. "Red zone defense, third-down defense, run defense, sacks—we want to improve on what we did a year ago. If we do, with the guys we have returning, we have a chance to have a special season."

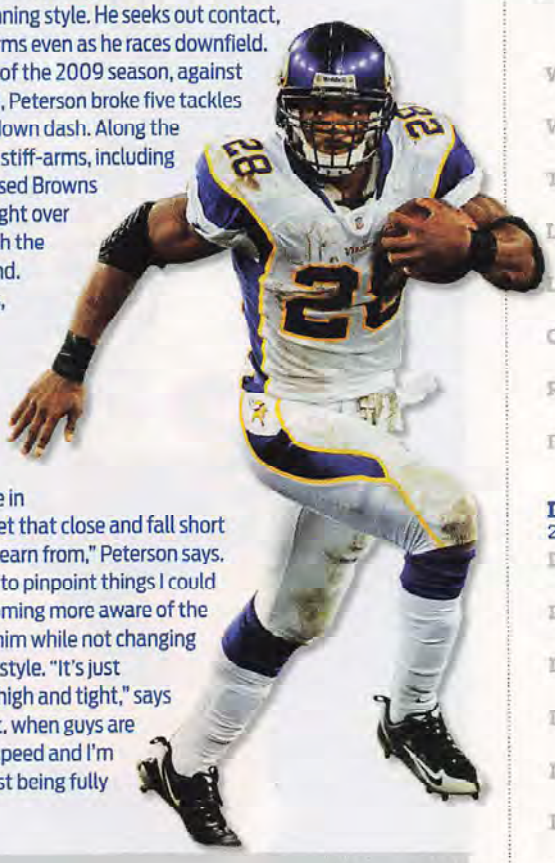
Inside the noisy Metrodome in 2009, it was clear how much the Vikings' defense and offense fed off each other, an Allen sack leading to a Favre touchdown on the next series, and back again. Minnesota wants to recapture those moments and carry them into a new year, and Favre will be the catalyst. But in the encore that everybody saw coming, the outcome is anybody's guess. —D.H.

SPOTLIGHT

Adrian Peterson, Running back

FOR MUCH of the off-season, the Vikings' superstar tailback worked on ball security, a nagging issue in his three otherwise dynamic seasons. Peterson has fumbled 20 times in the regular season and did so twice in the Vikings' NFC title game loss to New Orleans; he also misconnected with Brett Favre on a handoff inside the Saints' 10 at the end of the second quarter. "Right there on the goal line, that cost us," Peterson says of that giveaway, which was officially ruled a Favre fumble. "Sometimes I get too loose with the ball."

Part of Peterson's fumbling is a function of his confrontational running style. He seeks out contact, throwing out forearms even as he races downfield. In his signature run of the 2009 season, against Cleveland in Week 1, Peterson broke five tackles in a 64-yard touchdown dash. Along the way, he dished two stiff-arms, including one in which he tossed Browns cornerback Eric Wright over the left sideline with the heel of his right hand.



Those flourishes, however, have sometimes been canceled out by the fumbles, and never more so than with a Super Bowl berth at stake in New Orleans. "To get that close and fall short was something to learn from," Peterson says. "It was motivation to pinpoint things I could work on." Like becoming more aware of the defenders around him while not changing his violent running style. "It's just keeping [the ball] high and tight," says Peterson. "In traffic, when guys are coming at me full speed and I'm making cuts, it's just being fully aware of that."

BOB ROSATO

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **BRAD CHILDRESS**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 5

QB	**BRETT FAVRE**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		16	531	363	68.4
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		4,202	33	7	107.2
RB	**ADRIAN PETERSON**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		16	314	1,383	4.4
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		43	436	10.1	18
FB	**NAUFAU TAHI**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		15	3	5	1.7
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		10	67	6.7	1
WR	**PERCY HARVIN**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		15	70	790	8
WR	**BERNARD BERRIAN**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	55	618	4
TE	**VISANTHE SHIANCOE**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	56	566	11
LT	**BRYANT McKINNIE**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6'8"	335	
LG	**STEVE HUTCHINSON**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6'5"	313	
C	**JOHN SULLIVAN**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6'4"	301	
RG	**ANTHONY HERRERA**	G	HT	WT	
		14	6'2"	315	
RT	**PHIL LOADHOLT**	G	HT	WT	
		15	6'8"	343	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 6

DE	**RAY EDWARDS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	51	8½	0
DT	**PAT WILLIAMS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	44	2	0
DT	**KEVIN WILLIAMS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	30	6	0
DE	**JARED ALLEN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	51	14½	1
LB	**BEN LEBER**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	46	2½	0
LB	**E.J. HENDERSON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		12	83	2	0
LB	**CHAD GREENWAY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	99	0	3
CB	**ANTOINE WINFIELD**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		10	55	1	1
FS	**MADIEU WILLIAMS**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	74	0	0
SS	**TYRELL JOHNSON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	57	0	1
CB	**CEDRIC GRIFFIN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	73	0	4

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**CHRIS KLUWE**	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		73	43.9	37.8
K	**RYAN LONGWELL**	FG	XP	POINTS
		26–28	54–55	132
PR	**DARIUS REYNAUD**	RET	AVG	TD
		30	10.3	0
KR	**PERCY HARVIN**	RET	AVG	TD
		42	27.5	2

TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Chicago BEARS

An offensive whiz arrives on the Midway to inject some life into the attack

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 7–9

September
12 Detroit
19 at Dallas
27 Green Bay (M)

October
3 at N.Y. Giants
10 at Carolina
17 Seattle
24 Washington
31 BYE

November
7 at Buffalo*
14 Minnesota
18 at Miami (T)
28 Philadelphia

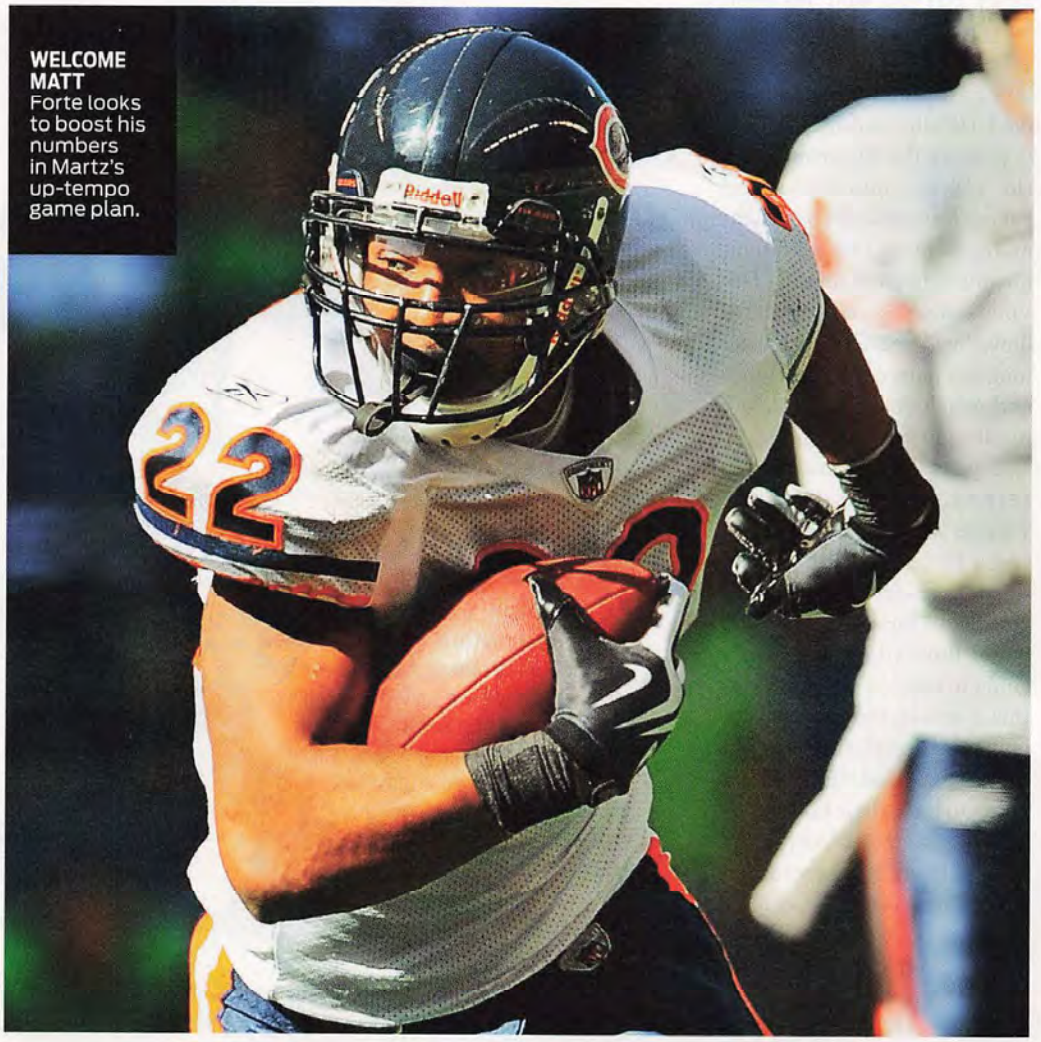
December
5 at Detroit
12 New England
20 at Minnesota (M)
26 N.Y. Jets

January
2 at Green Bay

(M) Monday (T) Thursday
***in Toronto**

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T14**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.504**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
Lovie Smith's crew must take advantage of an early home slate that includes three matchups with teams that were a combined 11–37, because the Bears' last four dates are against 2009 playoff teams. Chicago does catch a break by facing the Bills in Toronto, essentially a neutral site—Buffalo lost both of its previous regular-season games in the Rogers Centre.



WELCOME MATT Forte looks to boost his numbers in Martz's up-tempo game plan.

OTTO GREULE JR./GETTY IMAGES

IN CHICAGO'S offensive meeting room, every so often an image of the old St. Louis Rams will flash across the video screen—Kurt Warner under center, Marshall Faulk in the backfield, Isaac Bruce and Torry Holt at the line of scrimmage. The Bears are getting more than just a history lesson from Mike Martz, the newly arrived offensive coordinator who ran the Rams juggernaut (first as coordinator, then as coach) from 1999 through 2005. They are incorporating Martz's scheme and, they hope, some of that old St. Louis mojo.

"Coach Martz says we have the talent and ability to be like that team," says receiver Devin Aromashodu. "He shows us film of the things we can do if we just buy into what's going on. He's been real optimistic. I believe I have that ability, and I hope everyone else feels the same way. That way we can become a championship team."

Says Martz of his new charges, "These guys will define their future."

It wasn't long ago that the Bears' destiny appeared to be winning a Super Bowl, but since their run to the title game in the 2006 season, they haven't even made the playoffs. Coach Lovie Smith, who worked under Martz as defensive coordinator in St. Louis, hired the impresario to orchestrate an offense

that last season saw Jay Cutler throw a league-high 26 interceptions and running back Matt Forte average just 3.6 yards a carry. Further assistance in introducing the Rams way has come from Bruce, who tutored with receiver Devin Hester in the off-season and worked with the team as a minority coaching intern this summer.

With NFC North bullies Minnesota and Green Bay fielding quick-strike offenses, Chicago can't live with the breakdowns that stalled drives in 2009. "I've always respected his offensive mind," Smith says of Martz. "I'm excited about what he's done and what we're going to do this year. It's about scoring points."

Martz has long been a proponent of dictating the tempo of a game, snapping the football early in the 40-second clock, keeping a defense huffing and puffing. His is a playbook heavy on the pass, one that will require contributions out of the backfield from Forte and newly acquired Chester Taylor.

"It'll be different," Forte says of the offense. "We may use the pass to set up the run instead of running to set up the pass. If you have a passing attack, [defenses] can't stack everybody in the box. We're going to use that to our advantage."

The biggest burden will fall on Cutler, whose 76.8 passer rating in 2009 was his worst in four seasons as a pro. Cutler is blessed with a big arm, but too often it found the wrong jersey. Sometimes that was a function of a faulty offensive line (Cutler was sacked 35 times) but at other times those interceptions were the result of Cutler's own carelessness. Smith brought in Mike Tice to help shore up the front five, and they must do a better job keeping the quarterback clean. But Cutler's road back to Pro Bowl form will also depend on his grasp of the offense and his rapport with Hester and Aromashodu, fellow receivers Earl Bennett and Johnny Knox and tight end Greg Olsen.

"There are a lot of details; we just have to make sure we get them all," Cutler says. "[The offense] fits the characteristics of guys that we have—our skill sets with the receivers, tight ends and running backs, and the zone-blocking with our offensive line. Mike is the all-knowing source for this offense. It's his baby, and he does a great job giving me information. He's giving me every possible tool to succeed."

The wide-open philosophy is a departure from the Bears' grind-them-down running teams of the past, but in many ways that offense went the way of the old NFC Central. In Chicago's six division games last season the teams averaged a combined 52.5 points, compared to 39.4 over the previous decade.

If the Bears can play from ahead in 2010, it would pay dividends for a defense counting on instant impact from defensive end Julius Peppers, signed as a free agent from Carolina, and healthy returns by linebacker Brian Urlacher (wrist) and defensive tackle Tommie Harris (lingering knee problems).

Asked if Martz ever pokes his chest out while the offense watches his old Rams film, Forte says he doesn't have to. "He knows his system works," Forte says. On Sundays we'll learn if the Bears have the right pieces to run it. —D.H.

BOB ROSATO

SPOTLIGHT

Brian Urlacher, Linebacker

Two days before the Bears broke camp in Bourbonnais, Ill., Urlacher stood in front of the team cafeteria and ran a hand over his freshly cut Mohawk. The entire Chicago linebacking corps, including the longtime face of the franchise, had received buzz cuts in a show of unity, but Urlacher's mind was on the 2010 season. "I'm just happy to be healthy again," says the 32-year-old Urlacher, who missed 15 games last season after dislocating his right wrist in the opener against Green Bay. "Hopefully I'll be there for every game and have fun again."

Urlacher says he had no setbacks during a rehabilitation that began last December, when he had his cast removed after 12 weeks. In training camp he hit with his wrist, fell on it several times and felt no pain. "And the rest of my body feels good, too," he says.

The 11-year Chicago veteran is the longest-tenured member of the Bears defense and a six-time Pro Bowl selection, so his ability to stay healthy and be productive is critical to the Bears' success. Few players know the nuances of the league—and of Chicago's NFC North opponents—better than Urlacher, a fact that he embraces.

"We feel like we need to win right now, and the organization has made the moves to do that," he says. "I think this is the toughest division in football. And we're the best team."

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **LOVIE SMITH**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 23

QB	**JAY CUTLER**				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	16	555	336	60.5	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	3,666	27	26	76.8	
RB	**MATT FORTE**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	16	258	929	3.6	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	57	471	8.3	4	
H-B	**DESMOND CLARK**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	11	0	0	—	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	19	145	7.6	2	
WR	**DEVIN HESTER**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	13	57	757	3	
WR	**JOHNNY KNOX**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	15	45	527	5	
TE	**GREG OLSEN**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	16	60	612	8	
LT	**CHRIS WILLIAMS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 6"	315		
LG	**ROBERTO GARZA**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 2"	310		
C	**OLIN KREUTZ**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 2"	292		
RG	**LANCE LOUIS**				
	G	HT	WT		
	0	6' 2"	305		
RT	**FRANK OMIYALE**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 4"	315		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 17

DE	**MARK ANDERSON**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	28	3½	0
DT	**TOMMIE HARRIS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	24	2½	1
DT	**ANTHONY ADAMS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	44	2	0
DE	***JULIUS PEPPERS***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	42	10½	2
LB	**LANCE BRIGGS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	118	2½	1
LB	**BRIAN URLACHER**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	1	3	0	0
LB	**NICK ROACH**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	75	2	0
CB	**CHARLES TILLMAN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	77	0	2
FS	***CHRIS HARRIS***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	13	60	0	3
SS	**DANIEAL MANNING**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	92	1	1
CB	**ZACK BOWMAN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	66	0	6

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**BRAD MAYNARD**			
	PUNTS	AVG	NET	
	77	41.4	37.4	
K	**ROBBIE GOULD**			
	FG	XP	POINTS	
	24-28	33-33	105	
PR	**EARL BENNETT**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	14	10.2	1	
KR	**JOHNNY KNOX**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	32	29.0	1	

New acquisition
TTD: Total touchdowns

4 Detroit LIONS

Is that the sun peeking through the clouds over the Motor City 11?

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 2–14

September
12 at Chicago
19 Philadelphia
26 at Minnesota

October
3 at Green Bay
10 St. Louis
17 at N.Y. Giants
24 BYE
31 Washington

November
7 N.Y. Jets
14 at Buffalo
21 at Dallas
25 New England (T)

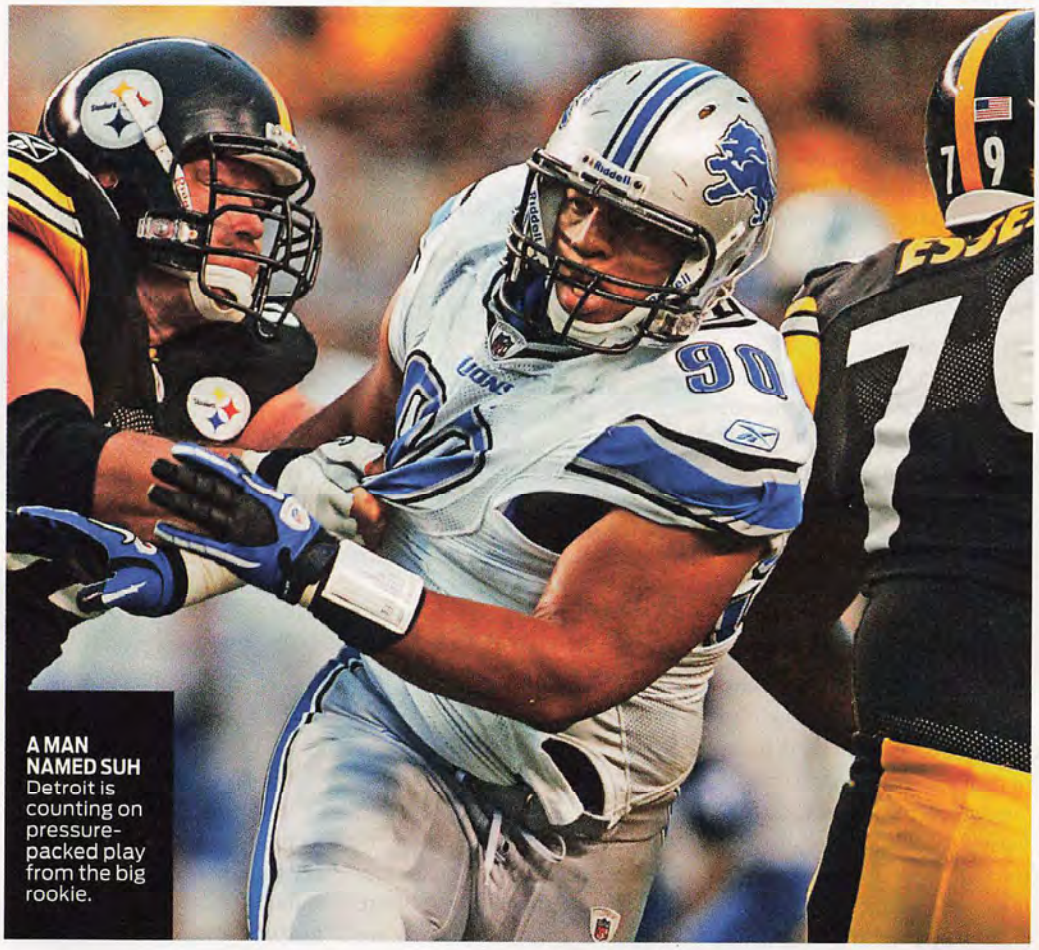
December
5 Chicago
12 Green Bay
19 at Tampa Bay
26 at Miami

January
2 Minnesota

(T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T12**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.508**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **8**

ANALYSIS
For a team desperate to build confidence, the Lions have a schedule designed to shake it. Not only do they face all three NFC North opponents, on the road, in the first four weeks, but they also have eight dates against teams from the powerful NFC East and AFC East. At least quartback Matthew Stafford faces only one potential cold-weather game—Week 10 against Buffalo.



A MAN NAMED SUH Detroit is counting on pressure-packed play from the big rookie.

SCOTT TERNA/CAL SPORT MEDIA

AFTER SIGNING a free-agent contract with the Lions last March, Nate Burleson and his wife, Atoya, sat down their six-year-old son, Nathaniel, to play a little game. Burleson, a wideout who had scored 15 touchdowns over the previous four seasons in Seattle, wanted to see if Nathaniel could guess his father's new football home. Two dozen teams came out of little Nathaniel's mouth—Super Bowl champions, playoff regulars, marquee franchises—but no mention of a club that has won a total of two games the past two seasons.

"Finally, I said, 'No, son, I'm playing for the Detroit Lions,' " says Burleson, recalling his boy's wide-eyed stare. "He looks at me and, with a high-pitched voice, goes, 'Detroit?' "

Nathaniel's shock was understandable considering the Lions' dismal decade, but the outlook in Detroit is sunnier in coach Jim Schwartz's second season. An influx of new players hit the Motor City during the off-season, and after years of misbegotten personnel moves, the Lions have built from the top of their last two drafts—quarterback Matthew Stafford, tight end Brandon Pettigrew and safety Louis Delmas in 2009; defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh and running back Jahvid Best in 2010—the engine that could ultimately lift them out of the NFC North cellar.

Is Detroit about to become an NFL destination?

"When people ask me with a negative connotation about going to Detroit—the city, the economy, the team—I say what about New Orleans?" says Burleson, who signed a five-year,

YOUR FRIENDS ALWAYS WANT TO WATCH THE GAME AT YOUR PLACE.

PERFECT.



HAND-SELECTED 100% WEBER BLUE AGAVE. THE WORLD'S FINEST ULTRA-PREMIUM TEQUILA.

SIMPLY PERFECT.

simplyperfect.com

The perfect way to enjoy Patrón is responsibly. © 2010 The Patrón Spirits Company, Las Vegas, NV. 40% Alc./Vol.

$25 million deal. "After [Hurricane] Katrina nobody wanted to be there, the locals or the players getting drafted or traded there. All of a sudden New Orleans is a place to go. The Saints revived the city. I honestly believe if we continue to work hard and bring the right guys in, we can turn around the organization and help revive [this] city."

The turnaround will have to begin on the field, where the Lions have so often looked overmatched. Schwartz and general manager Martin Mayhew addressed several deficiencies through aggressive off-season moves: signing Burleson and defensive end Kyle Vanden Bosch (who played under Schwartz in Tennessee) and trading for tight end Tony Scheffler, cornerback Chris Houston and defensive tackle Corey Williams.

Burleson and Scheffler should help draw attention from go-to receiver Calvin Johnson, who has faced double and triple teams since his rookie season in 2007. And if the talented Suh can adapt quickly to the Lions scheme, Detroit should be able to create pressure on the passer with only four linemen, much like Schwartz's defenses did in Tennessee.

"We took a different approach to free agency," Schwartz says. "Instead of trying to get a lot, we targeted two guys, Nate and Kyle, and went all in. But we were also able to supplement that through trades. What may turn out to be the key was picking up those other players. I think we're in a much better place than we were last year."

Stafford, to be sure, is in a better place. After splitting reps last summer with Daunte Culpepper and fighting through injury during his rookie season, Stafford enters 2010 in good health and as the unquestioned starting quarterback, if not a fully formed one. He and Johnson have been logging extra practice time on the field and occasionally hanging out away from the facility, trying to build the kind of relationship between a quarterback and a top receiver that has defined winning teams in the past.

Stafford impressed observers by playing through knee and shoulder injuries as a rookie, but he also missed six games.

"I was pretty much playing hurt the whole year," says Stafford. "Your best asset is being available. It kills me to be injured, and I'll try to play through just about anything to be out there."

Stafford stands to gain the most from the Lions' influx of players, a point he clearly recognizes. "We don't want it to be like it has been," Stafford says of the losing. "We do have a lot of weapons, but it's up to us to get some rhythm and get it going and move it forward. Come the first Sunday, Week One, it's, 'Go out there and prove it.' "

To themselves, to the city of Detroit and to little Nathaniel Burleson. —D.H.

SPOTLIGHT

Kyle Vanden Bosch, Defensive end

HE SPENT spent five seasons in Tennessee on one of the league's most feared defensive lines, suffocating offenses by rushing the quarterback, pinching in the running back and effectively shrinking the field. In Detroit, those objectives remain unchanged.

As does the defensive strategy. "It's the same scheme I played for the last five years," says Vanden Bosch, who signed a four-year, $26 million deal to play for Jim Schwartz, his former Titans defensive coordinator. "So it's been easy for me to come in and pick it up and help some of the younger guys new to the system. Nobody [around the league] expects much from us, and I think everybody here sees that as a challenge."

While Vanden Bosch is 31 and coming off a three-sack season, Schwartz says the defensive end looked as good on film as he did when he notched 12 sacks in 2007. "Sacks are a funny thing," Schwartz says. "Sometimes if [opponents] want to be able to take you out [of the play], they can. It was a dynamic change without Al [Haynesworth] next to him. I've heard people make the analogy in baseball—it's not so much what your batting average is, it's how you're hitting the ball. I have a lot of experience with Kyle, but I made sure that that didn't affect our judgment of him."

Schwartz let other members of the coaching staff and personnel department thoroughly evaluate Vanden Bosch independently before weighing in. "The last thing you want is to let you your past or your personal experience taint the judgment of others," Schwartz says. "When I saw that everybody felt the same way about him, then I said certain things about my history with him. Kyle's not here to do anything other than play football, sack the quarterback and be a marquee player."



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JIM SCHWARTZ**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 26

QB **MATTHEW STAFFORD**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
10	377	201	53.3
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
2,267	13	20	61.0

RB ***JAHVID BEST (R)***

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
9	141	867	6.1
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
22	213	9.7	16

FB **JEROME FELTON**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
13	15	46	3.1
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
13	133	10.2	0

WR **CALVIN JOHNSON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	67	984	5

WR ***NATE BURLESON***

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
13	63	812	3

TE ***TONY SCHEFFLER***

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	31	416	2

LT **JEFF BACKUS**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	305

LG ***ROB SIMS***

G	HT	WT
14	6' 3"	312

C **DOMINIC RAIOLA**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 1"	295

RG **STEPHEN PETERMAN**

G	HT	WT
9	6' 4"	323

RT **GOSDER CHERILUS**

G	HT	WT
15	6' 7"	325

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 32

DE **CLIFF AVRIL**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	41	5½	0

DT ***NDAMUKONG SUH (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	85	12	1

DT ***COREY WILLIAMS***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	31	4	0

DE ***KYLE VANDEN BOSCH***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	44	3	0

LB ***LANDON JOHNSON***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	20	0	0

LB **DeANDRE LEVY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	85	0	1

LB **JULIAN PETERSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	76	4½	0

CB ***CHRIS HOUSTON***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	47	0	1

FS **LOUIS DELMAS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	94	1	2

SS ***C.C. BROWN***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	69	0	0

CB **ERIC KING**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
4	7	0	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **NICK HARRIS**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
74	42.9	36.8

K **JASON HANSON**

FG	XP	POINTS
21–28	25–25	88

PR **DENNIS NORTHCUTT**

RET	AVG	TD
22	8.6	0

KR **AARON BROWN**

RET	AVG	TD
42	22.6	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

PETER READ MILLER



COCKTAILS PERFECT FOR SUMMER ENTERTAINING.

PATRÓN POMEGRANATE

1 oz. Patrón Silver
1/4 oz. Patrón Citrónge
Fresh pomegranate juice
Lemon squeeze

Pour Patrón Silver and Patrón Citrónge over ice. Add fresh pomegranate juice to taste. Finish with a squeeze of lemon. Garnish with an orange twist.

PATRÓN GRAPEFRUIT

1 oz. Patrón Silver
1/4 oz. Patrón Citrónge
Fresh grapefruit juice
Splash of club soda

Pour Patrón Silver and Patrón Citrónge over ice. Add fresh grapefruit juice. Top off with a splash of club soda. Garnish with grapefruit peel and lime.

PATRÓN PINEAPPLE

1 oz. Patrón Silver
1/4 oz. Patrón Citrónge
Fresh pineapple juice
Lime squeeze

Pour Patrón Silver and Patrón Citrónge over ice. Add fresh pineapple juice. Finish with a squeeze of lime. Garnish with a slice of lime.

LEARN THE PERFECT MIX:
PATRONTEQUILA.COM/COCKTAILS

SIMPLY PERFECT.

The perfect way to enjoy Patrón is responsibly. © 2010 The Patrón Spirits Company, Las Vegas, NV. Patrón Silver and Citrónge–40% Alc./Vol.

1 New Orleans SAINTS

A Lombardi Trophy doesn't mean there's no room to improve, especially on D

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 13–3

September
9 Minnesota (T)
20 at San Francisco (M)
26 Atlanta

October
3 Carolina
10 at Arizona
17 at Tampa Bay
24 Cleveland
31 Pittsburgh

November
7 at Carolina
14 BYE
21 Seattle
25 at Dallas (T)

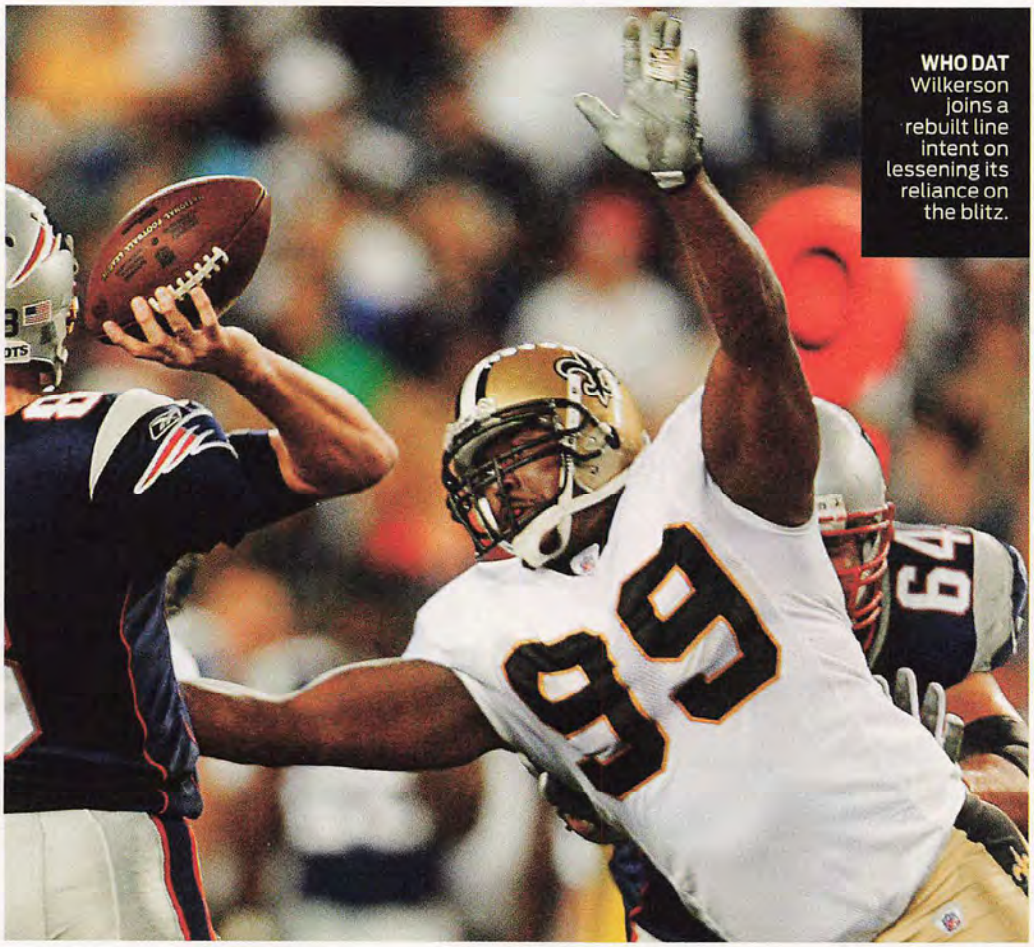
December
5 at Cincinnati
12 St. Louis
19 at Baltimore
27 at Atlanta (M)

January
2 Tampa Bay

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **27**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.469**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
The numbers say easy schedule, with only five playoff foes—but pitfalls abound. The Super Bowl champs open with the Vikings, who'll be out to prove they should have won the NFC title game. New Orleans has a short week to prepare for its Thanksgiving Day game in Dallas, and potential cold-weather games—problematic for the team in the past—loom at Cincinnati and Baltimore in December.



WHO DAT Wilkerson joins a rebuilt line intent on lessening its reliance on the blitz.

MICHAEL DEMOCKER/THE TIMES-PICAYUNE/LANDOV

STATS CAN be deceiving, and the Saints are quick to point out that the numbers misrepresented their defense during last year's Super Bowl run. The unit rated among the NFL's most opportunistic—New Orleans finished second in takeaways (39) and tied for first in points scored off turnovers (141). But overall it was below average (the Saints allowed 357.8 yards per game, eighth-worst in the league) and particularly dreadful against the run, with an average of 122.2 yards allowed per game (21st in the NFL).

What the numbers don't immediately show is just how much the Saints' high-powered offense was responsible for all of this. Last year Drew Brees & Co. often surged to commanding leads before halftime, forcing opponents into furious games of catch-up. While the Saints were effective in keeping teams out of the red zone, they surrendered a lot of yards in between the 20s. Most of those big plays came on the ground. "A lot of times when we would drop into zone-deep coverage to protect leads, teams would run draw plays on us, which would get them 20 yards or more," says Pro Bowl defensive end Will Smith, who anchored a line that gave up 11 such plays in '09. "At the end of the game it would look like they had a lot of running yards when really they only had one or two big plays."

This year the Saints have committed to shutting down the run altogether, a goal they believe can be partly achieved through better execution. "There were a lot of correctable

technique things that showed up on film," says middle linebacker Jonathan Vilma. "Stuff like maintaining gap assignments and keeping gap integrity is what we're trying to correct."

What's more, the Saints now have the personnel to get the job done. Though they lost a devastating pass rusher in March when they released defensive end Charles Grant, they brought in two veteran free agents, ends Alex Brown (formerly of the Bears) and Jimmy Wilkerson (Buccaneers). The two are disciplined in run coverage and have the tackles to show for it: Brown had 48, Wilkerson 46 last year, which would have trailed only Smith's 49 for most on the Saints' line.

New Orleans also brings back a healthy Sedrick Ellis to reinforce the middle. When the 6' 1", 305-pound defensive tackle missed six games last season with a right knee injury, the drop-off in the Saints' run defense was staggering. After holding four of their first 10 opponents below 100 yards rushing, the Saints gave up an average of 133 yards over their last six games. (It's no coincidence that after jumping out to a 10–0 start, New Orleans lost its final three.)

To protect themselves against another Ellis injury (the third-year vet has yet to play a full season), the Saints traded up in the draft to get 6' 4", 307-pound LSU tackle Al Woods in the fourth round. But their ace in the hole may be sixth-year lineman Anthony Hargrove. An end by trade, the 6' 3" 272-pounder was moved to tackle last season and thrived, with 42 tackles and five sacks while setting a personal best in fumble recoveries (three). Defensive coordinator Gregg Williams thinks Hargrove can have even better numbers now that he better understands his assignments in this defense. "He really didn't know how to play [defensive tackle] last year, but he played hard and tough," Williams says. "Now with a year under his belt and the whole off-season to develop, he's already playing much smarter and with better anticipation."

With a deep collection of big-but-quick bodies, the Saints have a defensive line that can limit gains on the ground and mount an effective pass rush. The revamped line gives Williams the flexibility to disrupt offenses without having to blitz as often as the Saints did last year, when they brought the house an astounding 208 times on first and second downs alone. "Knowing Gregg, we're not gonna do the exact same thing we did last year," says Smith, who promises that their unit's aggressive approach will remain unchanged. "We still want to put that fear of God in an offense and let them know that when they play against us, they're in for a long day."

—Andrew Lawrence

PETER READ MILLER

SPOTLIGHT

Tracy Porter, Cornerback

ONE OF the first things defensive coordinator Gregg Williams did when he arrived in New Orleans last season was go to work on Porter. As much as he liked the 5' 11", 185-pound corner's physical skills, the coach thought Porter was too reserved for his aggressive scheme. To toughen him up, Williams harangued Porter over every mistake, no matter how small. That not only thickened Porter's skin but made him more conscientious—and it showed in the playoffs. After snagging just four of the Saints' 26 interceptions during the regular season, Porter had two of the team's four INTs in the NFC title game and the Super Bowl.

His pick-six to seal New Orleans's first NFL crown is a testament to his diligent film study of the Colts' China route, a staple of their three-wideout formations in which the receiver split the farthest wide motions underneath the slot receiver, who runs an in-cut for a short gain. The play appeared so often on film that "it became imbedded in my brain," says Porter, who compared preparing for the Super Bowl to studying for a final. When he finally saw the play live, he felt like a student who knew the answer after reading only half of a test question. "It was like, Here it is. It finally happened," says Porter, who jumped in front of Reggie Wayne on a China route late in the fourth quarter and returned the interception 74 yards for a score.

With another year in Williams's scheme, don't be surprised if this student of the game vaults to the head of the cornerback class in 2010.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **SEAN PAYTON**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 1

QB **DREW BREES**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
15	514	363	70.6
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
4,388	34	11	109.6

RB **PIERRE THOMAS**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	147	793	5.4
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
39	302	7.7	8

FB **HEATH EVANS**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
6	5	16	3.2
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
10	70	7.0	3

WR **MARQUES COLSTON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	70	1,074	9

WR **DEVERY HENDERSON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	51	804	2

TE **JEREMY SHOCKEY**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
13	48	569	3

LT **JERMON BUSHROD**

G	HT	WT
15	6' 5"	315

LG **CARL NICKS**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	343

C **JONATHAN GOODWIN**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	318

RG **JAHRI EVANS**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	318

RT **JONATHAN STINCHCOMB**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	315

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 25

DE ***ALEX BROWN***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	48	6	0

DT **SEDRICK ELLIS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	34	2	0

DT **REMI AYODELE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	30	1½	0

DE **WILL SMITH**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	49	13	1

LB **JONATHAN CASILLAS**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
11	20	0	0

LB **JONATHAN VILMA**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	110	2	3

LB ***CLINT INGRAM***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	52	1	0

CB **JABARI GREER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
9	43	0	2

FS **DARREN SHARPER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	71	½	9

SS **ROMAN HARPER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	102	1½	0

CB **TRACY PORTER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	57	0	4

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **THOMAS MORSTEAD**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
58	43.6	36.0

K **GARRETT HARTLEY**

FG	XP	POINTS
9–11	10–11	37

PR **REGGIE BUSH**

RET	AVG	TD
27	4.8	0

KR **COURTNEY ROBY**

RET	AVG	TD
42	27.5	1

New acquisition
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 Carolina PANTHERS

A smart, low-risk offense will be the key to Carolina's hopes this season

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 record: 8–8

September
12 at N.Y. Giants
19 Tampa Bay
26 Cincinnati

October
3 at New Orleans
10 Chicago
17 BYE
24 San Francisco
31 at St. Louis

November
7 New Orleans
14 at Tampa Bay
21 Baltimore
28 at Cleveland

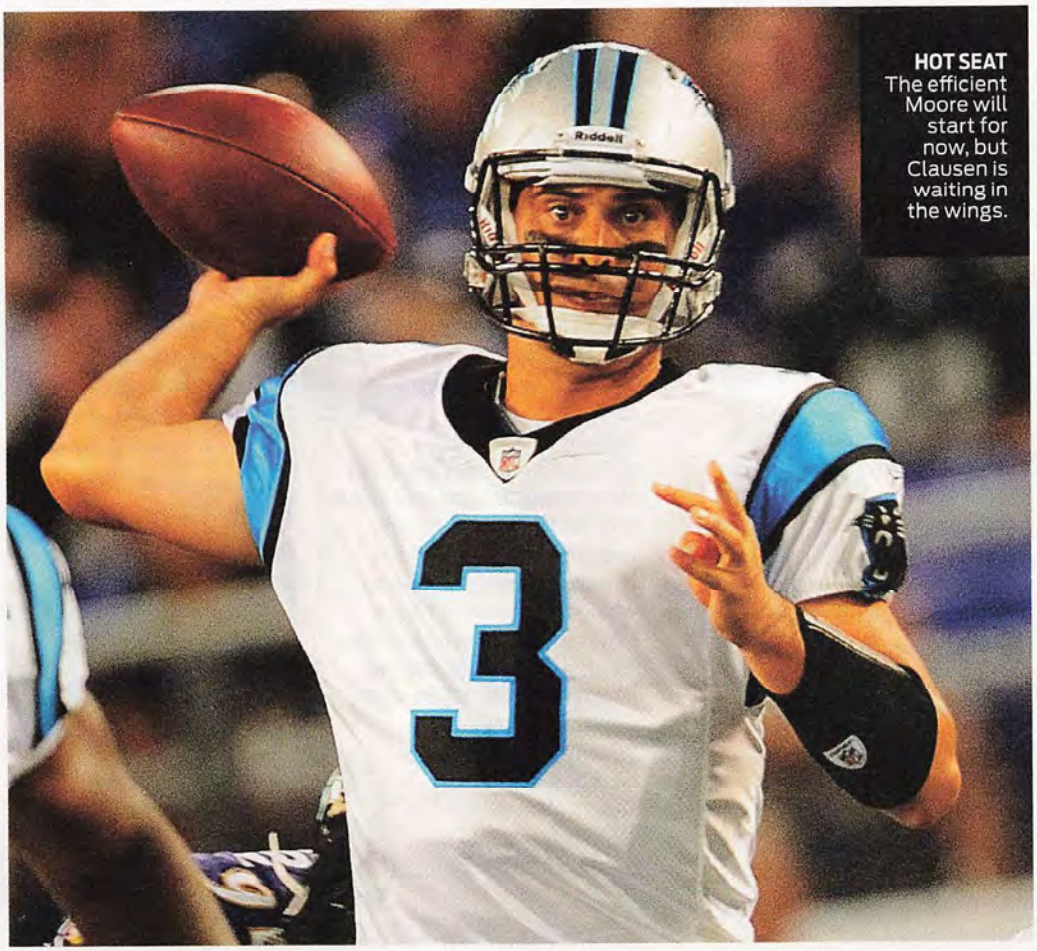
December
5 at Seattle
12 Atlanta
19 Arizona
23 at Pittsburgh (T)

January
2 at Atlanta

(T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **26**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.477**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
The Panthers were buried by an 0–3 start in 2009 but have a chance to build on the momentum they picked up at the end of the season, with four of their first six games in Charlotte. Not that their home dates are easy: Only two teams with losing records in '09—the Bucs and Bears—pay visits. The latter game, in Week 5, brings longtime Panthers defensive star Julius Peppers back to North Carolina.



HOT SEAT The efficient Moore will start for now, but Clausen is waiting in the wings.

AL TIELEMANS

WHEN IT comes to quarterbacks, there's almost a scarlet letter *M* (for marginal) on guys who went undrafted. There was one on Kurt Warner until he exploded for the Rams in 1999, one on Tony Romo till he got his chance in Dallas. "As a quarterback," Romo said last year, "when you don't go to the scouting combine and you don't get drafted, you're only going to get one chance—and you'll be lucky to even get that one. So you know you can't screw it up, or it'll be gone forever."

Imagine, then, the quandary of Matt Moore.

Undrafted out of Oregon State in 2007. Signed by the Cowboys. Waived by the Cowboys. Signed by the Panthers. Rode the bench, mostly, until late last season, when starter Jake Delhomme's slump became intolerable. Moore took charge of a 4–7 team beginning on Dec. 6 and won four of the last five games of the year. He completed 63% of his throws, threw eight touchdowns with one interception—he had 117 straight attempts without an interception to end the year—and had a lofty 104.9 passer rating, the best for 2009 of any quarterback besides Drew Brees and Brett Favre.

What impressed the Panthers most was Moore's demeanor. Nothing rattled him. He'd shrug off blitzers, find the hot reads just in time and know when to take shots downfield. "I really was nervous only once," Moore says. "On the field before we played Minnesota, Moose [wideout Muhsin Muhammad] introduced me to Brett Favre, and I thought, Wow,

I'm in the NFL, playing Brett Favre. But then I went back to playing football." Three touchdowns, no interceptions. Carolina routed the NFC North champs. "I've seen the pressure eat guys alive," Moore says, "but I learned in college, just be the same person you are. Play the way you can. The football will take care of itself."

In March, Carolina chose to release Delhomme and hand the starting job to Moore. Then, in April, the Panthers used their first pick of the draft on Notre Dame quarterback Jimmy Clausen. Selecting 48th overall because they'd dealt their first-rounder last year, the Panthers had no plans to pick a quarterback, but no one saw Clausen falling past the 20s. And there he was. "For some reason, every year when we've identified a quarterback to draft, he never got to us," coach John Fox says. "This is the first time we've had the chance to get one we really liked."

Moore was stunned. Asked for his reaction this summer, the supremely good-natured Moore paused for a full three seconds, trying to pick the right words. "It was . . . uh . . . unexpected," he said.

Right away the thought around the Carolinas was that Moore would just keep the seat warm for Clausen. It's possible, of course, but it's much more likely that Moore will be given the 2010 season to prove he's a capable NFL starter and leader.

"I've just kept in mind what my dad has always told me," Moore said. " 'The best guys will play.' If I play the way I can, I'm going to be the quarterback here."

The Carolina offense needs to be more efficient than it was in 2009. The Panthers won't deviate from their productive run-first attack; last year Jonathan Stewart (1,133 yards, 10 touchdowns) and DeAngelo Williams (1,117 yards, seven TDs) became the first pair of backs on the same team to surpass 1,100 rushing yards in a season. Basically, the quarterback's job is to not screw it up, and last year Delhomme (eight touchdowns, 18 interceptions, three lost fumbles) screwed it up. Moore won't win any fantasy-league passing titles, but if form follows, he's not going to turn it over much either. If he does, expect to see Clausen get a shot earlier than Fox would prefer.

"Somebody did a study on how much yardage teams get when the ball travels less than six yards in the air," Moore says. "A ton. What that means is that it's smart to take the checkdown when it's there instead of forcing the ball downfield. That's me. I'm always going to try to make the smart decision."

It's Moore's time in Carolina. How much time he has depends on how well he handles the external pressure—in games and on his own team—that never seems to go away. —P.K.

SPOTLIGHT

Everette Brown, Defensive end

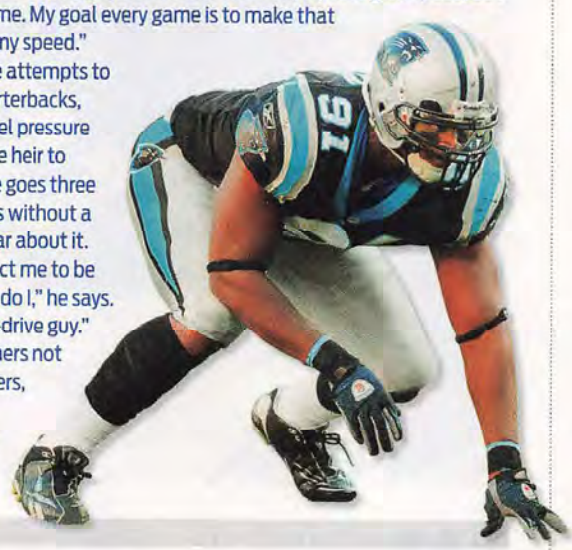
THE DEPARTED Julius Peppers will be replaced by committee—most likely a combination of run-stopper Charles Johnson, highly touted rookie Greg Hardy and rush-end Everette Brown. The key to the committee's success will be Brown, a 2009 second-round pick who has some of the quickness of Peppers but little of the power.

While Peppers was a three-down, 6' 7", 280-pound, complete defensive end, the 6' 1", 260-pound Brown is more of a classic third-down rusher who relies on speed and changeup moves. Carolina will likely move veteran Tyler Brayton from left end to right, facing him against the better pass blocker on opposing offenses. Brown will rotate to the left side on passing downs, although coach John Fox might experiment with shifting Brown and Brayton on third downs, depending on in-game matchups.

For Fox, pressure is as important as sacks. Peppers had 81 sacks in eight seasons, but Fox believes he had additional value in his ability to rattle quarterbacks. Brown had just 2½ sacks in limited playing time last year, but one of those came against Brett Favre in the Panthers' upset of Minnesota in December, when Brown raced by left tackle Bryant McKinnie for a first-quarter sack that started a deluge of Carolina pressure. And that's what the second-year end from Florida State hopes to bring to the field this fall.

"What I did at Florida State was set the tempo and the tone for our pass rush," Brown says. "For me, the game comes down to my speed. I'm not sure how many guys can turn the corner, dip and gain speed, but that's my game. My goal every game is to make that blocker fear my speed."

Even as he attempts to pressure quarterbacks, Brown will feel pressure himself as the heir to Peppers. If he goes three or four games without a sack, he'll hear about it. "People expect me to be great, and so do I," he says. "I'm an inner-drive guy." For the Panthers not to miss Peppers, Brown will need to be a sack guy.



SAM SHARPE/US PRESSWIRE

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **JOHN FOX**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 19

QB	**MATT MOORE**	G	ATT	COMP	PCT
		7	138	85	61.6
		YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
		1,053	8	2	98.5
RB	**DEANGELO WILLIAMS**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		13	216	1,117	5.2
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		29	252	8.7	7
FB	**TONY FIAMMETTA**	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
		10	0	0	—
		REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
		0	0	—	0
WR	**STEVE SMITH**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		15	65	982	7
WR	***BRANDON LAFELL (R)***	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		13	57	792	11
TE	**JEFF KING**	G	REC	YARDS	TTD
		16	25	200	3
LT	**JORDAN GROSS**	G	HT	WT	
		9	6' 4"	305	
LG	**TRAVELLE WHARTON**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	312	
C	**RYAN KALIL**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 2"	295	
RG	**MACKENZY BERNADEAU**	G	HT	WT	
		16	6' 4"	308	
RT	**JEFF OTAH**	G	HT	WT	
		13	6' 6"	330	

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 8

DE	**TYLER BRAYTON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	45	5	0
DT	***ED JOHNSON***	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		4	11	0	0
DT	**LOUIS LEONARD**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		2	6	1	0
DE	**EVERETTE BROWN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		15	22	2½	0
LB	**JON BEASON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	141	3	3
LB	**DAN CONNOR**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	30	0	0
LB	**JAMES ANDERSON**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	65	1	0
CB	**CHRIS GAMBLE**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	58	0	4
FS	**SHERROD MARTIN**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	23	0	3
SS	**CHARLES GODFREY**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		12	45	0	1
CB	**RICHARD MARSHALL**	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
		16	88	0	4

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**JASON BAKER**	PUNTS	AVG	NET
		76	44.1	36.6
K	**JOHN KASAY**	FG	XP	POINTS
		22–27	31–32	97
PR	**CAPTAIN MUNNERLYN**	RET	AVG	TD
		31	9.0	0
KR	**TYRELL SUTTON**	RET	AVG	TD
		14	21.6	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Atlanta FALCONS

The defense must coalesce for this maturing team to contend consistently

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 9–7

September
12 at Pittsburgh
19 Arizona
26 at New Orleans

October
3 San Francisco
10 at Cleveland
17 at Philadelphia
24 Cincinnati
31 BYE

November
7 Tampa Bay
11 Baltimore (T)
21 at St. Louis
28 Green Bay

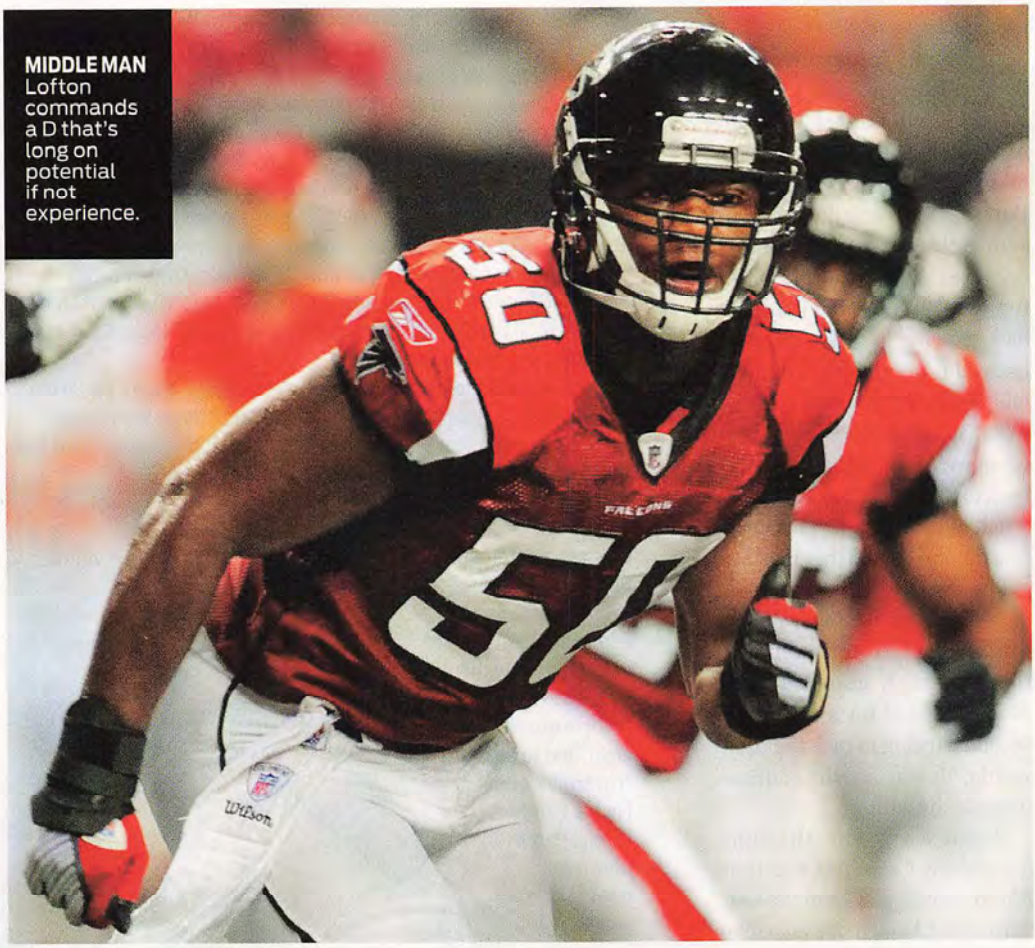
December
5 at Tampa Bay
12 at Carolina
19 at Seattle
27 New Orleans (M)

January
2 Carolina

(M) Monday (T) Thursday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **20**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.496**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **7**

ANALYSIS
The Falcons ran into one of the toughest schedules in the NFL last season and missed the playoffs despite high expections. The slate is more manageable this year, with 10 of 16 dates in domes and no snow games likely. Four of the last five are against divisional opponents, a stretch that will go far in determining whether Atlanta regains the top spot in the NFC South.



MIDDLE MAN Lofton commands a D that's long on potential if not experience.

BOB ROSATO

WATCHING HIS defense one afternoon in training camp, general manager Thomas Dimitroff savored the fruits of three years' worth of scouting. Kroy Biermann, the fifth-round pick from Dimitroff's first draft, in 2008, battled for the starting left end job with Lawrence Sidbury (fourth round, 2009). Last year's No. 1 choice (24th overall), tackle Peria Jerry, dug in on the starting line. This year's first-rounder, outside linebacker Sean Weatherspoon, worked on his speed rush next to middle 'backer Curtis Lofton, a 2008 second-rounder. The leader of the secondary, free safety Thomas DeCoud (third round, 2008) looked eager to unload on an unsuspecting receiver in a half-speed scrimmage. Those six prime defensive parts are all between the ages of 22 and 26. The franchise quarterback, Matt Ryan, is 25—and has made 31 starts.

"This is no longer a young team learning on the fly," Dimitroff says. "This team really believes it's ready to take that next step. I think we might be too."

What Dimitroff hopes he's building, through the draft and with recent imports at positions of major need such as cornerback (Dunta Robinson), running back (Michael Turner) and tight end (Tony Gonzalez), is a contender that won't suffer through 4–12 falloffs. Under Dimitroff in 2008 and '09, Atlanta had consecutive winning seasons for the first time in the franchise's 44-year history. But for consistent long-term success, his young defense must start to dominate.

The Falcons' D ranked 24th

TALK SPORTS. DRINK BIGELOW.

- Terry Francona

- Phil Simms

- Joe Torre



Three champions. They know a good thing when they see it, and have made drinking Bigelow green tea part of their daily routine.

BIGELOW®

bigelowtea.com

in the league in 2008 and 21st last year, when it had too many holes and got overpowered by strong offenses. In five games against the Cowboys, Giants, Eagles and Saints (twice), Atlanta allowed an average of 33.2 points. To address their shortcomings, the Falcons are banking on new faces at important positions. Emerging tackle Jonathan Babineaux had no one to help him on the inside last year; after missing the last 14 games of the season with a right knee injury, Jerry returns to provide a second knifing presence up the middle. At weakside linebacker Weatherspoon brings his loud presence—"He's the fiery dude we needed here," Dimitroff says—and a solid college résumé: 43½ tackles behind the line of scrimmage in four seasons at Missouri.

But the most important newcomer is Robinson, 28, the former Texan who signed a six-year free-agent deal, with $22.5 million guaranteed, in March. "We needed a player like this," Dimitroff says. No kidding. Only four teams allowed more passing yards than the 3,873 the Falcons surrendered, and Atlanta had nothing resembling a shutdown corner. Undrafted free agent Brent Grimes competed hard on one side, while a mishmash of Chris Houston (dealt to Detroit before the 2010 draft), Chevis Jackson and Christopher Owens got torched on the other. Robinson is no Darrelle Revis, but he's a top 10 cover guy who ensures that the Falcons will no longer be pushovers on obvious passing downs.

"Dunta brings a nastiness that we needed back there," says Lofton. "He's diving around in practice. He really competes. As a group we're starting to get that swagger. We've got a great mix of veterans and young kids starting to play like veterans."

Lofton himself has come a long way in two years. When he arrived in 2008, a 22-year-old kid just off the campus at Oklahoma, he felt self-conscious calling plays in a huddle filled with veterans. "I'm looking up and seeing Keith Brooking and these older guys, thinking, These guys got wives and kids. What am I doing here?" Lofton recalls. "But you gotta just play. It's a lot more natural now."

The pass defense would also be helped by more pressure up front; Atlanta had just 28 sacks last year. Biermann has to emerge. Or Sidbury. Or Weatherspoon. "What we need is to be a faster, more urgent defensive group," says coach Mike Smith, who arrived along with Dimitroff in 2008. "The key isn't really sacks but pressure. The Jets led the league in defense last year and brought consistent pressure, but they were middle of the pack in sacks. What does that mean? They made the ball come out fast, and when you do that you affect the passing game as much as getting a sack."

The Falcons have the prospects. Now those prospects have to blossom into players. —P.K.

SPOTLIGHT

Sean Weatherspoon, Linebacker



EARLY IN camp the Falcons vaulted Weatherspoon, the 19th pick out of Missouri, to No. 1 on the depth chart at weakside linebacker, hoping he'll supply the pass-rush pressure they've lacked. Defensive coordinator Brian Van Gorder chirped at the kid constantly because he needed him to be ready to start in Week 1. "Goddam rookie show out here!" Van Gorder yelled after Weatherspoon made a coverage mistake in one of his first practices. But the 22-year-old wasn't intimidated. In his second camp practice he brawled with veteran tackle Sam Baker.

When the Falcons scouted Weatherspoon, they knew they had to have him. "Sean played against a lot of spread offenses in the Big 12," coach Mike Smith says. "He played in space, which is what he'll have to do here. He faced displaced receivers playing all over the field. That's what the Saints do. He'll match up very well with his quickness against tight ends and backs."

The 6' 2", 245-pound Weatherspoon played in coverage more than he attacked the passer in college, so he's excited about taking on edge-rush duties. "Every linebacker loves to blitz," he says. "In this system they expect their linebackers to be fast and to be able to cover and rush. I'll make mistakes, but I really think I can be that spark."

One club source worries that vets will chafe at the fiery, outspoken Weatherspoon. So be it. With him you get the total package. "He's not just a three-down player," Smith says. "He's a four-down player. He could be a star on special teams. He's a coach's dream." And if Weatherspoon is knocking Drew Brees to the turf this fall, no Atlanta defender is going to care if he's mouthy while he's doing it.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MIKE SMITH**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 16

QB MATT RYAN

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
14	451	263	58.3
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
2,916	22	14	80.9

RB MICHAEL TURNER

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
11	178	871	4.9
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
5	35	7.0	10

FB OVIE MUGHELLI

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	4	10	2.5
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
7	51	7.3	1

WR RODDY WHITE

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	85	1,153	11

WR MICHAEL JENKINS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	50	635	1

TE TONY GONZALEZ

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	83	867	6

LT SAM BAKER

G	HT	WT
14	6' 5"	307

LG JUSTIN BLALOCK

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	329

C TODD McCLURE

G	HT	WT
16	6' 1"	296

RG HARVEY DAHL

G	HT	WT
11	6' 5"	305

RT TYSON CLABO

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	331

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 21

DE JAMAAL ANDERSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	27	½	0

DT PERIA JERRY

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
2	1	0	0

DT *COREY PETERS (R)*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	29	4	0

DE JOHN ABRAHAM

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	35	5½	0

LB *SEAN WEATHERSPOON (R)*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	103	4	1

LB CURTIS LOFTON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	133	0	0

LB STEPHEN NICHOLAS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	80	3	0

CB *DUNTA ROBINSON*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	64	0	0

FS THOMAS DeCOUD

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	68	2	3

SS ERIK COLEMAN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	116	0	0

CB BRENT GRIMES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	66	0	6

SPECIAL TEAMS

P MICHAEL KOENEN

PUNTS	AVG	NET
61	42.6	36.9

K MATT BRYANT

FG	XP	POINTS
7–10	10–10	31

PR ERIC WEEMS

RET	AVG	TD
27	10.0	0

KR ERIC WEEMS

RET	AVG	TD
48	25.3	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

BOB ROSATO



NFL PLAYERS

ADD BUFFALO WINGS, AND YOU PRETTY MUCH HAVE A MOBILE SPORTS BAR.

NFL Mobile. Live streaming video of Thursday and Sunday night games, NFL Network, and NFL RedZone. With NFL Mobile, this season football comes to you. Only from Verizon. Download NFL Mobile at **www.verizonwireless.com/nfl** or **TEXT "NFL" to 8915.**

RULE THE AIR

Starting 9/1, a $10 monthly V CAST Video on Demand subscription is required to view video content.

verizon | NFL

Official Wireless Service Provider of the NFL

Message rates may apply. Available on select 3G Smartphones. Coverage not available everywhere. ©2010 Verizon. ©2010 NFL Properties LLC. Team names/logos/indicia are trademarks of the teams indicated. All other NFL-related trademarks are trademarks of the National Football League. NFL PLAYERS is a trademark of National Football League Players Incorporated.

4 Tampa Bay BUCCANEERS

It's the Dungy blueprint: Lay the foundation, and a title will come. Eventually

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 3–13

September
12 Cleveland
19 at Carolina
26 Pittsburgh

October
3 BYE
10 at Cincinnati
17 New Orleans
24 St. Louis
31 at Arizona

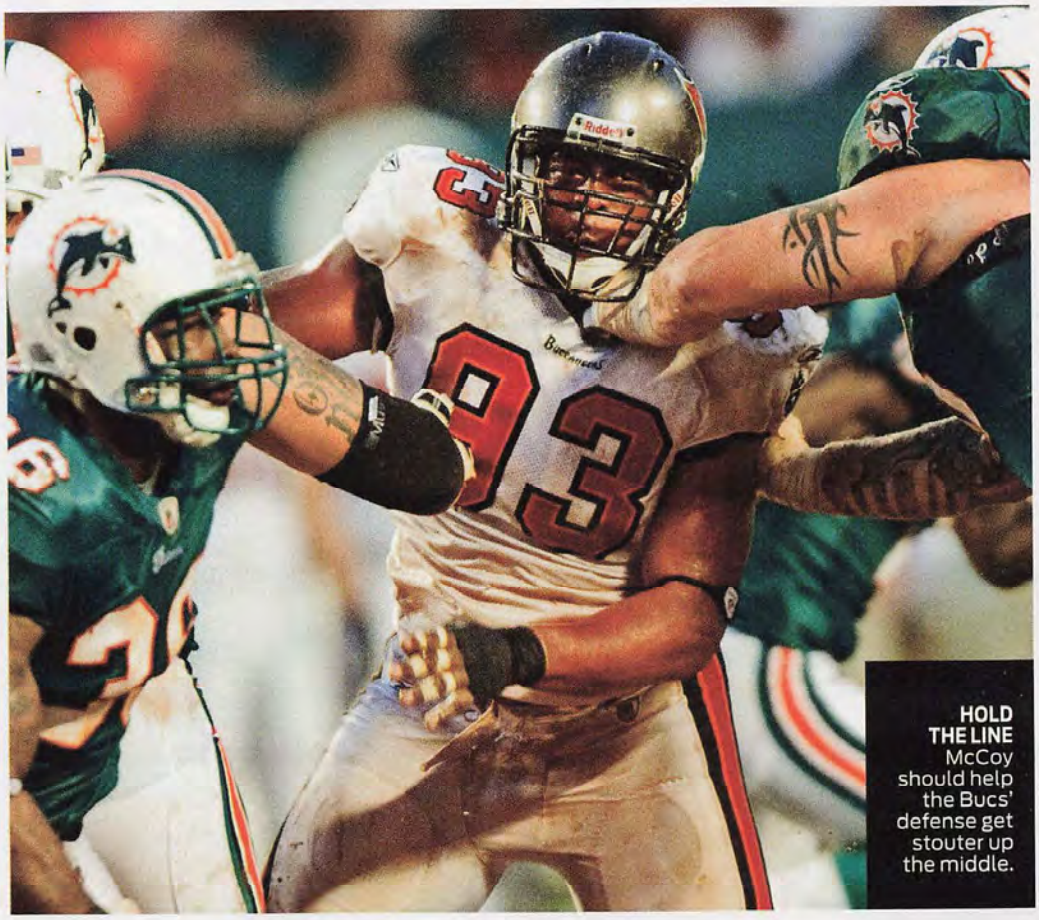
November
7 at Atlanta
14 Carolina
21 at San Francisco
28 at Baltimore

December
5 Atlanta
12 at Washington
19 Detroit
26 Seattle

January
2 at New Orleans

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **25**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.480**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **5**

ANALYSIS
To turn things around, the Bucs must start early. They have winnable home games against the Browns and the Steelers (without Ben Roethlisberger) at home in Weeks 1 and 3 before a dicey trip to Cincy and a home date with the defending champion Saints. The slate gets hard starting in Week 8 with a four-game stretch that includes two cross-country road trips, to Arizona and to San Francisco.



HOLD THE LINE McCoy should help the Bucs' defense get stouter up the middle.

JASON FARKHURST/TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

FIVE WORDS you never want to say to your team or to your fans: "This is a rebuilding year." Realistically, though, there's no other way the Bucs can present their 2010 season to the faithful. Far too often teams believe they're two players or a couple of breaks away from a Lombardi Trophy. But the Bucs, teamed in the NFC South with the Super Bowl champion Saints and playoff contenders in Atlanta and Carolina, realized after last year's 3–13 nightmare that they had some major repair work to do.

The Bucs have hung out the UNDER CONSTRUCTION sign. By sitting out free agency and becoming a major player in the April draft, they followed the blueprint Tony Dungy employed when he took over in Tampa in 1996 and said his team would sink or swim with the kids on the roster. The Bucs went 24–24 in Dungy's first three years, but the groundwork was laid for a Super Bowl championship in the 2002 season. For this team to have similar success down the road, two things are vital. Last year's first-round quarterback, Josh Freeman, must prove he's the real thing. And this year's draft class—from which three of the top five choices could wind up starting and another two seeing major minutes early on—has to be the kind of blockbuster that great teams produce every few years. "We don't have any room or any time for our rookies to think they're rookies," said third-year corner Aqib Talib. "This is the land of opportunity. They've got to come through."

The Bucs passed on some places of need, such as running back and pass rusher, to address two positions above all in the 2010 draft: defensive tackle and wide receiver. Tampa Bay

allowed 158.2 yards per game on the ground last year, last in the NFL and third-worst in team history, so lively defensive tackles Gerald McCoy (selected third overall, out of Oklahoma) and Brian Price (35th, UCLA) will be counted on to resuscitate the line in a rotation with 2009 third-rounder Roy Miller. The 6' 4", 295-pound McCoy will be expected to knife through gaps, push the pocket and pressure the quarterback, whether he gets sacks or not. Price, more squat at 6' 1", 303 (he played the nose, rush end and tackle in college), will be relied on to hold the point on running downs. Price was a disruptive force during camp, more so than McCoy, and the Bucs think he can be the kind of tackle who won't have to leave the field on passing downs.

At receiver, general manager Mark Dominik made one logical pick and one risky one. Second-rounder Arrelious Benn of Illinois probably won't push incumbent Sammie Stroughter (a 2009 seventh-rounder) out of a starting job, but he looks to be a lock to play the third, or slot, receiver. The star of training camp, fourth-round pick Mike Williams from Syracuse, was one of the surprises of the summer in the NFL. Freeman says the 6' 2", 212-pound Williams "allows me to just put the ball up there, and he makes the contested catch." Almost from the first practice coach Raheem Morris has called Williams a starter and talked about making him a major building block of the offense. "I want to be the steal of the draft," says Williams. "The teams that didn't pick me are gonna have to suffer."

That's pretty lofty stuff for a kid whose college career ended in controversy. In 2008 he was accused of cheating on a test and suspended from school. In '09 he was suspended from the team for two curfew violations, and coach Doug Marrone announced that Williams had quit the squad—a charge the receiver denies to this day. "My problems at Syracuse weren't character issues," he says. "They were school issues. I wasn't very good at school. I didn't quit there, and I won't quit here. Ask anyone here. I run extra routes after practice, I do whatever I'm asked to do and more."

"Everyone deserves a second chance," says Morris. "I don't know, maybe a third chance. I don't know what chance he's on, but we spent as much time on him before this draft as on anyone, and we believe in him."

So, in the last 18 months the Bucs set out to fix three critical units through the draft: quarterback (Freeman), defensive tackle (McCoy, Miller, Price) and wide receiver (Stroughter, Williams, Benn). Those seven players are all 24 or younger. Is the foundation for success established? We'll begin to learn this year. —P.K.

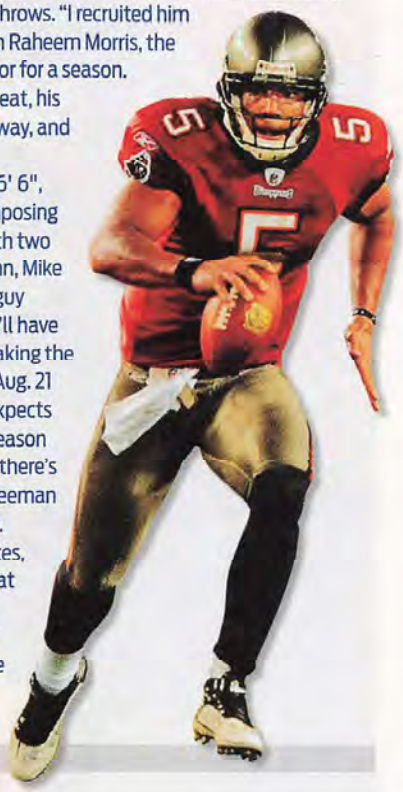
GARY BOGDON

SPOTLIGHT

Josh Freeman, Quarterback

A FEW DAYS after the Super Bowl, Bucs general manager Mark Dominik looked out his office window and saw his quarterback involved in a throwing workout on the practice field with one of the team's young receivers. Dominik was so excited about Freeman's showing up to work out at 8 a.m. a month before the off-season program began that he talked to team cochairman Joel Glazer. "He said, 'Isn't that what quarterbacks are supposed to do?' " recalls Dominik. "I said they are, but not many of them do."

A bright-eyed leader at 22, Freeman has the off-the-field stuff to be a team's long-term quarterback. Now he must show he's accurate enough, smart enough and tough enough to become a quarterback the Bucs can win with. In three years at Kansas State he was a 59% passer with a plus-10 touchdown-to-interception differential. Good, not great. As a rookie last year Freeman was 30th among NFL starters in passer rating (ahead of only Jake Delhomme and JaMarcus Russell) and completed 54.5% of his throws. "I recruited him out of high school," says coach Raheem Morris, the Wildcats' defensive coordinator for a season. "His character, his will to be great, his leadership, all showed right away, and it's showing here."



Right. But can he play? At 6' 6", 248 pounds, Freeman is an imposing presence, but he's working with two rookie receivers (Arrelious Benn, Mike Williams) and a second-year guy (Sammie Stroughter), and he'll have less preseason work after breaking the tip of his throwing thumb on Aug. 21 against Kansas City. (Morris expects Freeman to be ready for the season opener.) "With new receivers, there's going to be growing pains," Freeman said in camp, before the injury. "We've got a lot of timing routes, so that's tough. But this is what I signed up for. I want the ball in my hands. I can do this." All that's riding on Freeman is the Bucs' future.

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **RAHEEM MORRIS**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 28

QB **JOSH FREEMAN**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
10	290	158	54.5
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
1,855	10	18	59.8

RB **CADILLAC WILLIAMS**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	211	823	3.9
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
28	217	7.8	7

FB **EARNEST GRAHAM**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
13	14	66	4.7
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
14	109	7.8	0

WR **SAMMIE STROUGHTER**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
13	31	334	1

WR ***MIKE WILLIAMS (R)***

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
7	49	746	6

TE **KELLEN WINSLOW JR.**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	77	884	5

LT **DONALD PENN**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	305

LG ***KEYDRICK VINCENT***

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	325

C **JEFF FAINE**

G	HT	WT
12	6' 3"	291

RG **DAVIN JOSEPH**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	313

RT **JEREMY TRUEBLOOD**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 8"	320

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 27

DE **TIM CROWDER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	43	3½	0

DT ***GERALD McCOY (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	34	6	0

DT **ROY MILLER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	33	2	0

DE **STYLEZ WHITE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	43	6½	0

LB **GENO HAYES**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	98	3	2

LB **BARRETT RUUD**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	142	0	1

LB **QUINCY BLACK**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	84	1½	1

CB **AQIB TALIB**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	64	0	5

FS **TANARD JACKSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	71	0	5

SS ***SEAN JONES***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	61	1	2

CB **RONDE BARBER**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	77	2	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P ***BRENT BOWDEN (R)***

PUNTS	AVG
57	43.8

K **CONNOR BARTH**

FG	XP	POINTS
14–19	12–12	54

PR **CLIFTON SMITH**

RET	AVG	TD
23	10.1	0

KR **CLIFTON SMITH**

RET	AVG	TD
31	29.1	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

1 San Francisco 49ERS

Mike Singletary's crew will go as far as quarterback Alex Smith can take them

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 8–8

September
12 at Seattle
20 New Orleans (M)
26 at Kansas City

October
3 at Atlanta
10 Philadelphia
17 Oakland
24 at Carolina
31 vs. Denver*

November
7 BYE
14 St. Louis
21 Tampa Bay
29 at Arizona (M)

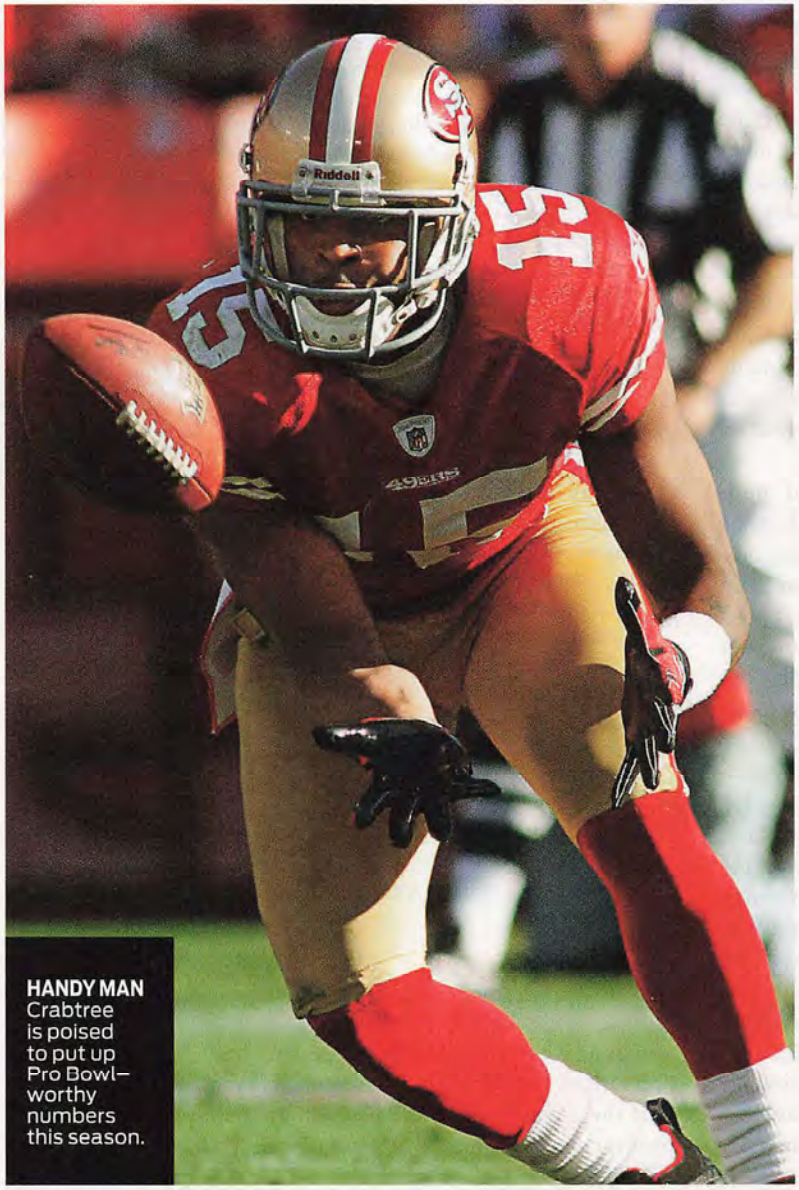
December
5 at Green Bay
12 Seattle
16 at San Diego (T)
26 at St. Louis

January
2 Arizona

(M) Monday (T) Thursday
***in London**

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **28**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.457**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **6**

ANALYSIS
Life will get a little easier for the Niners right after their transatlantic trip to play the Broncos at Wembley in Week 8. They have the typical post-London bye and follow that up with winnable home games against the Rams and Buccaneers. But they play three of their first four on the road—the home game's against the champion Saints—and have four road trips in five weeks beginning on Nov. 29.



HANDY MAN Crabtree is poised to put up Pro Bowl–worthy numbers this season.

EVERYTHING APPEARS to be in place for the 49ers to make a run at their first playoff berth in eight years. The defense allowed fewer points than all but three teams last season, the receiving corps features big-play threats in tight end Vernon Davis and wideout Michael Crabtree, and coach Mike Singletary has no qualms about keeping a foot in the players' backsides if they lose focus.

That leaves quarterback Alex Smith—the No. 1 overall pick of the 2005 draft, who has yet to convert a spoiled fan base into believers—as the key to how far the 49ers will go. Though Smith might never win over the public after Joe Montana and Steve Young set the bar so high during their Hall of Fame careers, you get the sense that he is comfortable with that. He has been through the worst situation possible—five offensive systems in his first five years, two shoulder surgeries, a former head coach who questioned his toughness, an offensive coordinator who tried to break him mentally because he believed Smith had been pampered, and a $17 million pay cut—yet his will and confidence remain intact.

One reason is that he hasn't had to learn a new offensive system between seasons for the first time in his career; another is that he now has a coach and an offensive coordinator who not only challenge him but also believe in him. Singletary made that clear in the off-season when he didn't pursue a quarterback in free agency or use either of his two first-round draft choices on one.

CARY EDMONDSON/US PRESSWIRE

Like coordinator Jimmy Raye, Singletary saw Smith grow as a player and a leader last season, when the QB returned to the lineup in Week 7 after missing 28 consecutive games because of injury and finished the year with career highs in passer rating (81.5), completion percentage (60.5) and touchdown passes (18) while throwing for 2,350 yards.

"It's almost ridiculous to think about how far he has come since I got here [in February 2009]," says Raye. "I don't mean for this to be derogatory," he continued, "but Alex wasn't close to being able to play in the NFL at this time last year. He had so many things to overcome. The biggest thing for him now is that for the first time the system didn't change. He's more familiar with the nomenclature. He understands what he's doing, and now he can take it and go. He believes what I believe about him, and he believes that [Singletary] has got his back. He's comfortable that way. That's the biggest thing that's going to propel him to the next level."

That, and the fact that he's surrounded by San Francisco's deepest team since he arrived five years ago. Davis led all tight ends in 2009 with 13 touchdown catches; Crabtree is a Pro Bowler–in-waiting after catching 48 passes for 625 yards and two scores despite missing all of training camp and the first five games in a contract dispute last year; and running back Frank Gore ranked third with 10 rushing scores and fifth in total yards in the NFC in '09. The team also upgraded the line by using the 11th and 17th picks in April's draft to select offensive tackle Anthony Davis and guard Mike Iupati, who are expected to start immediately.

Secure in his knowledge of the 49ers system for the first time, Smith focused on fundamentals in the off-season with quarterbacks coach Mike Johnson drilling him on footwork, drops, resets and firming his base when releasing the ball. They also spent a lot of time in the classroom.

"He's understanding everything we're trying to do from a protection standpoint and a route standpoint, and it's allowing him to play faster," Johnson says. "Alex is a very competitive person, and he wants to prove to everyone that he was the Number 1 pick for a reason and warrants that type of respect. He has a tremendous amount of self-respect and pride and works harder than anybody I've ever coached. He's growing."

And he's hungry. Smith had a chance to leave the organization after the 2008 season, when he was a year and a half removed from his last game and coming off a second shoulder surgery. But instead of tucking and running, he allowed the 49ers to restructure his contract and decided to see if he could succeed in San Francisco.

"It would have been easy to leave, to go get a fresh start," Smith says. "But I don't know if that would have been the right thing to do. I know I can play. It's just about going out and doing it." —*Jim Trotter*

SPOTLIGHT

Frank Gore, Running back

GORE MIGHT be the league's most insecure Pro Bowl running back. It's not uncommon for him to ask out-of-town reporters what people are saying about his game. He remains miffed that he wasn't selected until the third round of the 2005 draft and still tracks the output of the five backs drafted ahead of him—Ronnie Brown, Cedric Benson, Cadillac Williams, J.J. Arrington and Eric Shelton—his goal being to end his career with statistics that surpass any of theirs.

Which brings us to the 49ers' signing of former Pro Bowl running back Brian Westbrook. The move wasn't made to motivate Gore, who remains the unchallenged starter. But anyone who knows Gore acknowledges that it will push the sixth-year pro even harder; if he's unwilling to be shown up by someone drafted ahead of him, he's definitely not going to accept being outplayed by someone on his own team.

A former University of Miami star, Gore is the only back in 49ers history to surpass 1,000 yards rushing in four consecutive seasons, and his 4,953 rushing yards during that time rank fourth in the league. When asked if Westbrook's presence could push him past the franchise single-season record of 1,695 yards rushing he set in 2006, Gore flashed a broad smile. It was a smile similar to the one that a team official displayed when discussing how Westbrook's arrival could benefit the team in multiple ways, including providing a change-of-pace threat, playoff experience for a team that hasn't reached the postseason since '02—and added motivation for the speedy and bruising Gore.



PETER READ MILLER

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **MIKE SINGLETARY**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 27

QB ALEX SMITH

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
11	372	225	60.5
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
2,350	18	12	81.5

RB FRANK GORE

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	229	1,120	4.9
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
52	406	7.8	13

FB MORAN NORRIS

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	14	41	2.9
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
7	31	4.4	1

WR MICHAEL CRABTREE

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
11	48	625	2

WR JOSH MORGAN

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	52	527	3

TE VERNON DAVIS

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	78	965	13

LT JOE STALEY

G	HT	WT
9	6'5"	315

LG *MIKE IUPATI (R)*

G	HT	WT
13	6'5"	331

C ERIC HEITMANN

G	HT	WT
16	6'3"	312

RG CHILO RACHAL

G	HT	WT
16	6'5"	323

RT *ANTHONY DAVIS (R)*

G	HT	WT
13	6'5"	323

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 15

DE ISAAC SOPOAGA

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	29	1	0

NT AUBRAYO FRANKLIN

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	36	2	1

DE JUSTIN SMITH

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	55	6	0

LB MANNY LAWSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	68	6½	0

LB TAKEO SPIKES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	75	4	0

LB PATRICK WILLIS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	152	4	3

LB PARYS HARALSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	45	5	0

CB NATE CLEMENTS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
7	35	0	1

FS DASHON GOLDSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	94	2	4

SS MICHAEL LEWIS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	82	1	1

CB SHAWNTAE SPENCER

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	53	0	2

SPECIAL TEAMS

P ANDY LEE

PUNTS	AVG	NET
99	47.6	41.0

K JOE NEDNEY

FG	XP	POINTS
17–21	33–33	84

PR *TED GINN JR.*

RET	AVG	TD
5	5.6	0

KR *TED GINN JR.*

RET	AVG	TD
52	24.9	2

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

2 Seattle SEAHAWKS

New coach Pete Carroll hopes a jolt of intensity will result in wins

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 5-11

September
12 San Francisco
19 at Denver
26 San Diego

October
3 at St. Louis
10 BYE
17 at Chicago
24 Arizona
31 at Oakland

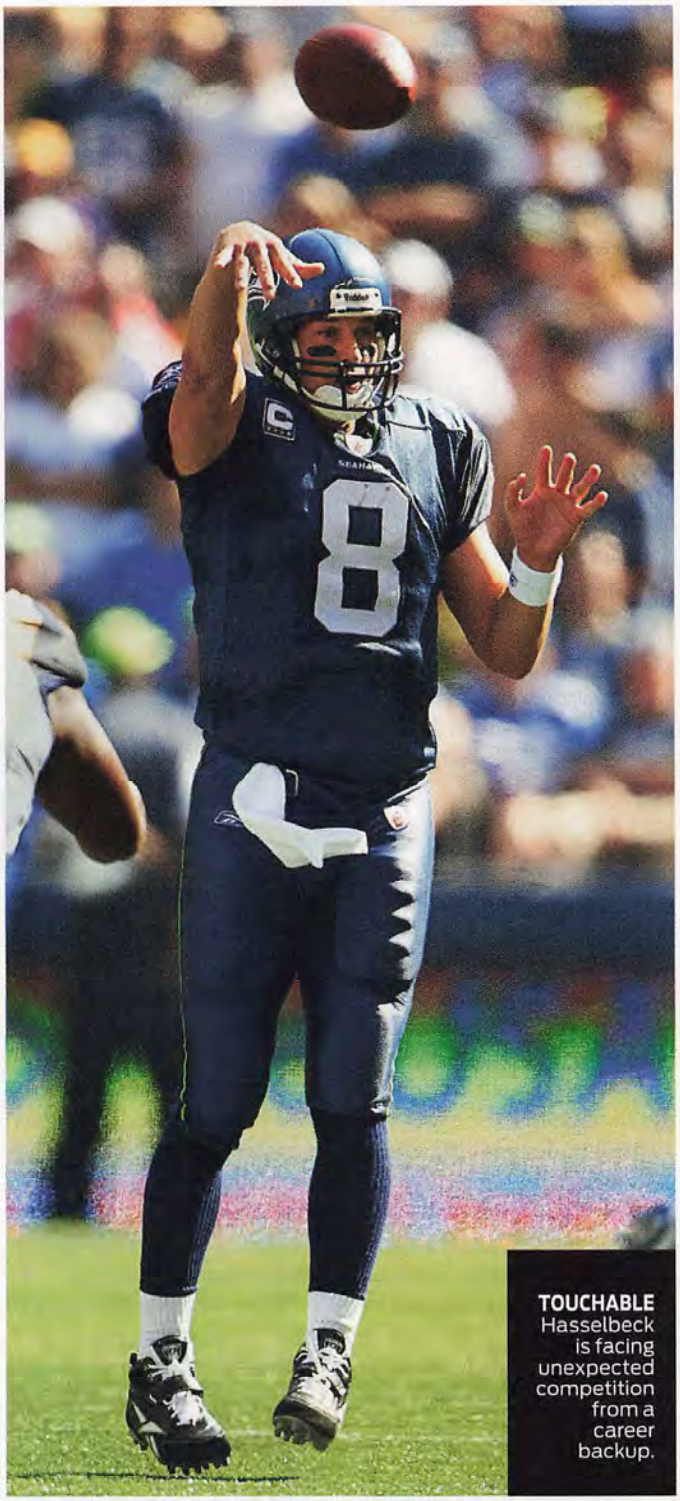
November
7 N.Y. Giants
14 at Arizona
21 at New Orleans
28 Kansas City

December
5 Carolina
12 at San Francisco
19 Atlanta
26 at Tampa Bay

January
2 St. Louis

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **T29**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.453**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
Pete Carroll gets a break in his first season: The Seahawks face only three teams that made the '09 playoffs, and their interconference division is the AFC West, meaning less cross-country travel than usual—only three of their games are scheduled to start at 10 a.m. Pacific time. Carroll will know early where his club stands in the NFC West, as he'll see all three divisional opponents in the first six games.



TOUCHABLE Hasselbeck is facing unexpected competition from a career backup.

ROBERT BECK

THE SLOGAN "Always compete" is visible throughout the Seahawks' training facility. You see it on everything from banners and T-shirts to the practice-field scoreboard. But nowhere is it more prominent than on the face of new coach Pete Carroll, who is seeking to turn around a franchise that won just nine games in the past two seasons.

Quarterback Matt Hasselbeck learned as much on the eve of training camp, when he and Carroll had a meeting on a basketball court adjacent to the training complex.

They had not had a real clear-the-air session since Carroll and general manager John Schneider surrendered a third-round pick to San Diego for third-string quarterback Charlie Whitehurst in March, then signed him to an $8 million, two-year contract. One of Carroll's team rules is "no complaining or whining," so Hasselbeck, who was entering the final year of his contract after nine years as the starter, walked lightly when broaching the subject.

"I was like, I'll be honest. I know I'm totally biased here, but, hey, come on, why?" Hasselbeck recalled of the meeting. "It was like the Steve Young situation. When he was with the 49ers and they used their first-round pick to draft Jim Druckenmiller, he wasn't like, Oh, crap. Jim Druckenmiller is going to beat me out. It was just like, Hey, man. I'm older, our team is pretty good, we just

need a few more pieces to get back to the Super Bowl. What are we doing?"

Carroll responded to Hasselbeck's question by reiterating his belief that competition is the lifeblood of a program. If Hasselbeck didn't already get that, he found out when Carroll crouched into a defensive stance while wearing flip-flops. Game on.

Hasselbeck, who turns 35 this year, wondered how best to proceed. He thought back to 2000, when he asked permission to marry his girlfriend, Sarah, while playing a game of two-on-two hoops with his future father-in-law and brother-in-law. Hasselbeck's teammate was a 6' 7" buddy who clearly didn't understand the art of buttering up future in-laws, because at one point he attempted a dunk. Hasselbeck quickly reminded his friend that they needed to lose the game.

A decade later he was back on the court with another man who could control his future. He wondered just how seriously he should take the game; after all Carroll, who had kicked off his footwear, is 24 years older and is ultimately in charge of Hasselbeck's playing time.

Hasselbeck didn't have to wonder long, if at all. "Remember that story about your father-in-law," Carroll said, then warned his QB not to lose on purpose. *Always compete* isn't just a slogan for the coach; it's a mind-set.

So they battled to seven, with Hasselbeck winning by two. Now his goal is to claim the starting job. That seemed all but certain early in training camp, but Hasselbeck struggled in the exhibition opener against the Titans while Whitehurst, who had been pedestrian in practice, wowed everyone with a 14-of-22, 214-yard, two-score performance.

Seattle needs strong play at quarterback because other than at tight end, where John Carlson is solid, the Seahawks have question marks at every offensive position. The line struggled last season and was thrown into greater flux in the second exhibition game when top rookie Russell Okung, a massive left tackle, sustained a serious ankle sprain. He's out for several weeks. The receiving corps lacks a proven No. 1, and the running backs are quick but undersized. Carroll will look to add a sledgehammer back when other teams begin making cuts.

Hasselbeck remains pragmatic about his situation and knows that what he's done in the past doesn't matter. Yes, the previous regime had approached him about a contract extension, but there has been no such outreach from the new leadership.

"I just live in the moment," Hasselbeck says. "There are so many unknowns, so much that is out of your control. Would it be nice to know I'm going to be playing for the Seahawks next year? Yeah, it would be really nice to know that. But the bottom line is, Hey: We got to turn this program around. If you can do it with us, we're with you. If not, we'll find somebody else. I'm fine with that."

In other words, Always compete. —J.T.

SPOTLIGHT

Aaron Curry, Linebacker

AFTER DRAFTING Curry fourth overall in 2009, the Seahawks' previous management marveled at how he showed more pass-rush ability in off-season workouts than he did on Wake Forest's game tapes. Now would be a good time for Curry to blossom into an edge rusher, because Seattle lacks a pass-rush presence. The team had only two sacks over its final five games last season, and its top three ends are gone—Patrick Kerney to retirement, Darryl Tapp and Lawrence Jackson in trades.

Curry may have the ability to rush the passer, but does he have the mind-set? The 6' 2" 255-pounder prefers playing over the tight end; however, most successful pass rushers come from the weak side of the formation, where there is less traffic. Beyond Curry the Seahawks don't have much. End Chris Clemons had eight sacks three years ago with Oakland, but he got just seven total during the past two seasons with Philadelphia. Linebacker Leroy Hill made a strong impression as a rookie in 2005 with 7½ sacks, but he sprained a knee early in camp and might not be healthy by the opener (which he'll miss while serving a one-game suspension for violating the league's substance-abuse policy).

Curry has vowed to be a different player this year than the one who had just two sacks in '09. He has said that he played "soft" as a rookie because he was worried about making mistakes. His goal in '10: "imposing my will." The Seahawks are holding their collective breath that he's a man of his word.



JOHN W. MCDONOUGH

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **PETE CARROLL**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 21

QB **MATT HASSELBECK**

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
14	488	293	60.0
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
3,029	17	17	75.1

RB **JULIUS JONES**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
14	177	663	3.7
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
35	232	6.6	4

FB **OWEN SCHMITT**

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
15	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
6	21	3.5	1

WR **T.J. HOUSHMANDZADEH**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	79	911	3

WR **DEION BRANCH**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
14	45	437	2

TE **JOHN CARLSON**

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	51	574	7

LT ***RUSSELL OKUNG (R)***

G	HT	WT
13	6' 5"	310

LG ***BEN HAMILTON***

G	HT	WT
15	6' 5"	290

C **CHRIS SPENCER**

G	HT	WT
14	6' 3"	309

RG **MAX UNGER**

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	305

RT **SEAN LOCKLEAR**

G	HT	WT
10	6' 4"	310

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 24

DE ***CHRIS CLEMONS***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	11	3	0

DT **BRANDON MEBANE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	49	1½	0

DT **COLIN COLE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	48	0	0

DE **RED BRYANT**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
6	8	0	0

LB **DAVID HAWTHORNE**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	117	4	3

LB **LOFA TATUPU**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
5	32	1	0

LB **AARON CURRY**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	61	2	0

CB **MARCUS TRUFANT**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
10	49	0	2

FS ***EARL THOMAS (R)***

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	77	0	8

SS **JORDAN BABINEAUX**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	104	1½	2

CB **JOSH WILSON**

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
12	45	1	2

SPECIAL TEAMS

P **JON RYAN**

PUNTS	AVG	NET
88	46.2	38.7

K **OLINDO MARE**

FG	XP	POINTS
24–26	28–28	100

PR ***GOLDEN TATE (R)***

RET	AVG	TD
12	14.3	1

KR **JUSTIN FORSETT**

RET	AVG	TD
18	24.0	0

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

3 Arizona CARDINALS

An All-Pro receiver waits to see if someone—anyone—can get him the ball

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 10–6

September
12 at St. Louis
19 at Atlanta
26 Oakland

October
3 at San Diego
10 New Orleans
17 BYE
24 at Seattle
31 Tampa Bay

November
7 at Minnesota
14 Seattle
21 at Kansas City
29 San Francisco (M)

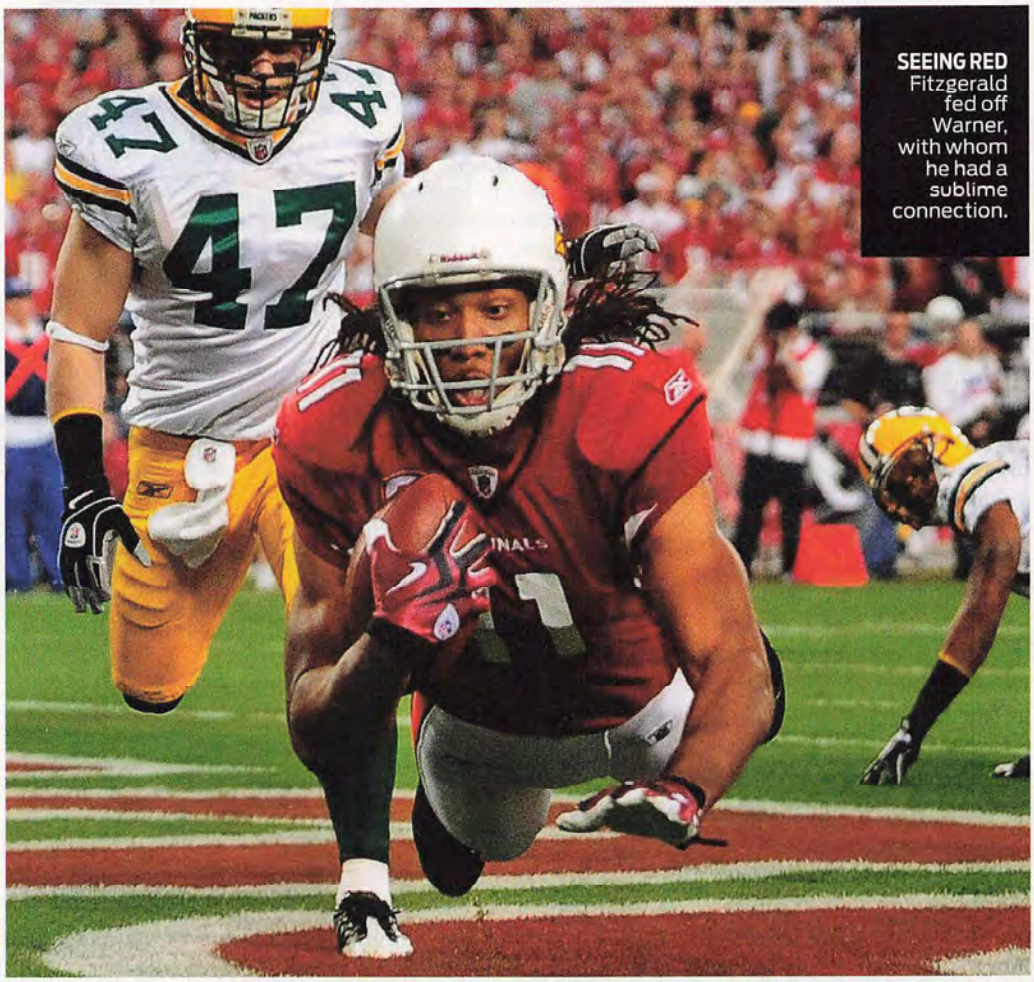
December
5 St. Louis
12 Denver
19 at Carolina
25 Dallas (S)

January
2 at San Francisco

(M) Monday (S) Saturday

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **32**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.445**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
For the team with the league's easiest schedule, the Cards have tough games early—trips to Atlanta and San Diego before a Week 5 home matchup against the defending champion Saints. Matt Leinart will have his chances to put a lock on the starting job: Arizona faces six of the bottom 10 defenses from last season. And the Cards have to be relieved not to have to travel to the Northeast.



SEEING RED Fitzgerald fed off Warner, with whom he had a sublime connection.

MARK J. REBILAS/US PRESSWIRE

LARRY FITZGERALD lined up to the far left of the formation during the Cardinals' preseason opener against the Texans on Aug. 14, leaned forward and burst off the line at the snap of the ball. He sprinted about 15 yards downfield and cut sharply toward the middle as quarterback Matt Leinart zipped a pass toward him.

But the ball was a bit too far in front of Fitzgerald, who had to reach up and out to get it. In hindsight it may have been the best "bad" ball Leinart has ever thrown, because it possibly saved Fitzgerald from a season-ending knee injury. The four-time Pro Bowl wideout's right cleat was off the turf when Houston safety Eugene Wilson came in low and delivered a crunching blow just above his right knee. There was some give in the joint on contact, but it resulted only in a sprained knee ligament instead of a torn one.

Questions linger about whether Fitzgerald will connect with Leinart as well as he did with the retired Kurt Warner, whose 56 touchdown passes over the past two seasons (23 to Fitzgerald) were fifth best in the league. Warner and Fitzgerald shared a special synergy and trust—Warner could count on Fitzgerald to be at a particular spot at a particular time, and Fitzgerald could count on Warner to deliver the ball in stride. Now what?

Fitzgerald invited Leinart, the 10th pick in the 2006 draft and Warner's backup for the last two years, to join him at his wide-outs camp in Minnesota this

off-season, but Leinart declined because he wanted to work out in the Los Angeles area and be closer to his son. "Everything will be fine," Leinart said during camp. "I've been throwing passes to Larry for five years." If only most of those passes had been completed somewhere besides on the practice field.

It says something about the greatness of Fitzgerald and the inexperience of Leinart that their relationship dominates discussions about the Cardinals' fortunes. Few teams endured as much personnel disruption during the off-season—Warner retired, linebacker Karlos Dansby and free safety Antrel Rolle left as free agents, and only one starter on the offensive line, center Lyle Sendlein, returns at the position he played last season—but what will determine the Cardinals' fate is how Fitzgerald will fare without Warner.

Fitzgerald caught 345 passes for 4,586 yards and 39 touchdowns from Warner over their 60 games together. The duo was particularly lethal in the postseason, when in six games Warner completed 40 passes for 676 yards and nine scores to Fitzgerald. And of course, Warner was the one feeding Fitzgerald on the wideout's record-setting playoff run two years ago.

"Can I be happy if my numbers drop off?" Fitzgerald says. "Yeah. What choice do I have? I'm at the point in my career where I've pretty much achieved all the personal accolades that one can aspire to. At this point I really just want to be on a team that's consistently in the playoffs."

It's possible Fitzgerald will continue to get his numbers, though in a different way. Warner relied on timing and intuition and a largely intermediate passing game that allowed receivers to run with the ball after the catch. But Leinart is more of a downfield passer. He has a stronger arm and is more willing to take chances.

The Cardinals believe that wrinkle will give them more opportunities to stretch defenses—if they can run the ball behind their revamped line as well as they hope. Beanie Wells came on strong at the end of his rookie season last year, and the 6' 2", 228-pound back from Ohio State expects to build on his 2009 numbers (793 rushing yards, seven touchdowns). He will push starting back Tim Hightower, who appears leaner and hungry to keep his job.

Fitzgerald is on board with the boosted run game. "I don't think we'll be throwing the ball as much as we did when Kurt was here, because that was something he really excelled at," he says. "That was his strength—going no-huddle and using single-back packages. We will be a lot more balanced, which will create bigger plays down the field for receivers. If that's what it takes for us to win, I'm all for it." —J.T.

BOB ROSATO

SPOTLIGHT

Kerry Rhodes, Safety

JOINING A new team can be awkward, but for Rhodes, who came to the Cardinals from the Jets in a trade for draft picks last March, the transition from New York to Arizona has been particularly bumpy. Even before his first practice, the publicity-happy Rhodes—he's done modeling and has appeared in a Lady Gaga video—had to deal with questions about whether he was more interested in being a player or a playboy. Complicating matters was that the person asking the loudest was new teammate Darnell Dockett, a Pro Bowl defensive tackle and Cardinals captain.

Dockett not only wondered on Twitter whether Rhodes was putting in enough work in the off-season but also told Rhodes on the first day of training camp that earrings wouldn't fly on the field. Perhaps Dockett was being hard on Rhodes because Dockett was close to Antrel Rolle, the playmaking safety who left the Cardinals to sign as a free agent with the Giants. Or maybe Dockett is more concerned with winning games than winning friends.

A fourth-round pick of the Jets in 2005, Rhodes started every game in his first four seasons but fell out of favor with Rex Ryan last year and was briefly benched. If he's on his game—he's averaged 83 tackles a year and has 15 career interceptions—he and Cardinals veteran Adrian Wilson could form the league's best safety tandem. If Rhodes is distracted by his side interests, Arizona could have a problem. Dockett certainly will.



PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **KEN WHISENHUNT**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 14

QB MATT LEINART

G	ATT	COMP	PCT
8	77	51	66.2
YARDS	TD	INT	RATING
435	0	3	64.6

RB TIM HIGHTOWER

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
16	143	598	4.2
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
63	428	6.8	8

FB NEHEMIAH BROUGHTON*

G	ATT	YARDS	AVG
2	0	0	—
REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD
0	0	—	0

WR LARRY FITZGERALD

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
16	97	1,092	13

WR STEVE BREASTON

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
15	55	712	3

TE BEN PATRICK

G	REC	YARDS	TTD
9	12	146	2

LT LEVI BROWN

G	HT	WT
16	6' 6"	324

LG *ALAN FANECA*

G	HT	WT
16	6' 5"	316

C LYLE SENDLEIN

G	HT	WT
16	6' 3"	309

RG REGGIE WELLS

G	HT	WT
16	6' 4"	314

RT BRANDON KEITH

G	HT	WT
4	6' 5"	335

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 20

DE CALAIS CAMPBELL

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	48	7	0

NT BRYAN ROBINSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	28	1	0

DT DARNELL DOCKETT

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	51	7	1

LB CLARK HAGGANS

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	74	5	0

LB GERALD HAYES

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	62	0	0

LB *PARIS LENON*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
15	42	0	0

LB *JOEY PORTER*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
14	41	9	0

CB DOMINIQUE RODGERS-CROMARTIE

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	50	0	6

FS *KERRY RHODES*

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	63	0	3

SS ADRIAN WILSON

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
16	74	2	5

CB GREG TOLER

G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
13	11	0	1

SPECIAL TEAMS

P BEN GRAHAM

PUNTS	AVG	NET AVG
86	47.0	40.6

K *JAY FEELY*

FG	XP	POINTS
30–36	32–32	122

PR *ANDRE ROBERTS (R)*

RET	AVG	TD
14	15.5	0

KR LAROD STEPHENS-HOWLING

RET	AVG	TD
52	24.2	1

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns *2006 stats

4 St. Louis RAMS

A berth in the playoffs is a long shot, but Steven Jackson runs on and on

2010 SCHEDULE
2009 Record: 1–15

September
12 Arizona
19 at Oakland
26 Washington

October
3 Seattle
10 at Detroit
17 San Diego
24 at Tampa Bay
31 Carolina

November
7 BYE
14 at San Francisco
21 Atlanta
28 at Denver

December
5 at Arizona
12 at New Orleans
19 Kansas City
26 San Francisco

January
2 at Seattle

SCHEDULE STRENGTH
NFL Rank: **31**
Opponents' 2009 winning percentage: **.449**
Games against 2009 playoff teams: **4**

ANALYSIS
Here's how parity is *supposed* to function. As the Rams try to work out of their funk, they have just five dates with teams that had winning records in 2009. Of their first eight games, only three are on the road, and those trips are to Oakland, Detroit and Tampa Bay (combined '09 record: 10–38). St. Louis will need to make the best of the first half because the season gets more daunting after a Week 9 bye, with four challenging road games in five weeks.



HAIR FORCE Long the face of the franchise, Jackson will get help from this year's No. 1.

SCOTT ROVAK/US PRESSWIRE

AFTER LOSING 28–7 to the Vikings at home in their preseason opener on Aug. 14, the Rams returned to the practice field determined to clean up their mistakes. Late in a session two days afterward, Steven Jackson took a handoff, headed toward the right side of the line and was bumped off balance by wide receiver Donnie Avery, who had been pushed into the hole by a stronger defender.

Jackson, who is as intense in workouts as he is in games, picked himself up off the turf and slammed the ball between his hands in frustration. His angry words went unheard by onlookers at practice, but they might as well have been *Details, details*. Later in the practice he went to Avery and explained to the receiver that he has to hold his ground when sealing the edge on a running play to his side, otherwise the hole shrinks.

"And the holes are already small enough," Jackson says, chuckling.

Not that Jackson needs his holes to be gaping. Despite playing behind a makeshift line last season, and with a passing game that was nonexistent at times, the two-time Pro Bowler ran for 1,416 yards, and his 1,738 yards from scrimmage ranked fifth in the NFL. With rookie Sam Bradford, the top pick in April's draft, expected to take over at quarterback at some point this year—if not right away—Jackson will be counted on to carry even more of the load in St. Louis, which seems physically impossible considering that he's been carrying most of it already. His 324 rushes last season were 297

more than his backup, the largest gap in the league.

Says center Jason Brown, "What do they call that special player on *Madden*? The game-breaker? He's our game-breaker. He adds an explosive nature to our offense. We know as an offensive line if we do our job at least 10 percent better than last year and sustain some of those blocks, it's off to the house for him. Our goal this year is make sure that we allow Steven to shine in the way that he deserves."

Jackson has been overshadowed much of his career not only because he has played on bad teams—the Rams were 1–15 in 2009; they're 6–42 since '07 and have not had a winning season during his six-year tenure—but also because his Pro Bowl seasons coincided with record-breaking performances by other backs. (Last season it was Tennessee's Chris Johnson who took center stage.) The only records Jackson is concerned with at this point, however, are those on the paper taped to his locker: the St. Louis franchise rushing leaders. Jackson needs only 539 yards to eclipse Eric Dickerson's alltime Rams mark of 7,245. If Jackson maintains his career average of 79.8 yards a game, he'll reach that sometime around the Rams' Oct. 24 date at Tampa Bay. "When I signed here, I wanted to leave this franchise as its leading rusher," he says. "I wanted to break every rushing record that they have. That's still my personal goal."

It grates on Jackson that his only playoff appearance came as a rookie backup in 2004, but the prospects of a turnaround this season are dim. No matter how ready Bradford is when he takes over, there isn't much for him to work with. Injuries prevented the five projected starting offensive linemen—the team drafted 6' 5", 325-pound left tackle Rodger Saffold 33rd overall out of Indiana in April to shore up a group that gave up 44 sacks last year, seventh worst in the NFL—from playing together during the first half of training camp. The St. Louis receiving corps, meanwhile, lacks a proven No. 1 wideout, a deficiency that became more pronounced after Avery (47 receptions in 2009) was lost for the season last week when he tore the ACL in his right knee.

But Jackson, rather than seek an exit from such a mess before his skills diminish, soldiers on, running through defenders, setting an example for teammates, focusing on the microscopic details that ultimately separate success from failure. "That's why Steven is as good as he is," says middle linebacker James Laurinaitis. "He has the mentality that if he's going to be on the field, he's going to work. When you have a guy who is the face of your franchise and he carries around that type of attitude, it really sends a message and gets the point across."

In St. Louis, Jackson's point can't hit home soon enough.

—J.T.

DAMIAN STROHMEYER

SPOTLIGHT

Sam Bradford, Quarterback

ONE THING is certain in St. Louis: Bradford, who was drafted first overall and signed a six-year, $78 million contract that includes a record $50 million in guaranteed money, will play this year. The only questions are *When?* and *How much?*

Coach Steve Spagnuolo was an Eagles assistant in 1999 when Philadelphia drafted Donovan McNabb second overall and used him situationally for two months before making him the starter. That turned out well for the Eagles, as McNabb took the team to five NFC Championship Games and one Super Bowl. Still, Spagnuolo has refused to say if he'll follow the same blueprint with Bradford.



But the coach's appreciation of the player has only grown since the draft. Throughout the off-season and training camp Bradford has displayed excellent arm strength, accuracy and poise in the pocket. He has consistently placed passes where only his receivers could get them, and during one drill on Aug. 16, he repeatedly zipped passes both in front of the safety and beyond the trailing linebacker on seam routes.

Also competing for the starting job is A.J. Feeley, who knows St. Louis's system from when he was with Spagnuolo and offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur in Philadelphia. But it seems only a matter of time before the ball and the offense is handed to Bradford.

"I really don't know if there's a right way to do it," says Bradford, who threw for 189 yards and two touchdowns in a 36–35 win over the Patriots last Thursday. "I know for me, as a competitor, I want to be on the field as soon as our coaches feel I'm ready."

PROJECTED STARTERS

WITH 2009 STATS

COACH **STEVE SPAGNUOLO**

OFFENSE

2009 Rank: 29

QB	***SAM BRADFORD (R)***				
	G	ATT	COMP	PCT	
	3	69	39	56.5	
	YARDS	TD	INT	RATING	
	562	2	0	134.5	
RB	**STEVEN JACKSON**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	15	324	1,416	4.4	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	51	322	6.3	4	
FB	**MIKE KARNEY**				
	G	ATT	YARDS	AVG	
	14	2	8	4.0	
	REC	YARDS	AVG	TTD	
	6	16	2.7	0	
WR	**LAURENT ROBINSON**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	3	13	167	1	
WR	**DANNY AMENDOLA**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	14	43	326	1	
TE	**DANIEL FELLS**				
	G	REC	YARDS	TTD	
	14	21	273	3	
LT	***RODGER SAFFOLD (R)***				
	G	HT	WT		
	12	6' 5"	323		
LG	**JACOB BELL**				
	G	HT	WT		
	13	6' 4"	300		
C	**JASON BROWN**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 3"	328		
RG	**ADAM GOLDBERG**				
	G	HT	WT		
	16	6' 7"	309		
RT	**JASON SMITH**				
	G	HT	WT		
	8	6' 5"	307		

DEFENSE

2009 Rank: 29

DE	**VICTOR ADEYANJU**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	10	7	0	0
DT	***FRED ROBBINS***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	25	2	0
DT	**CLIFTON RYAN**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	42	1	0
DE	**CHRIS LONG**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	43	5	0
LB	**LARRY GRANT**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	19	1	0
LB	**JAMES LAURINAITIS**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	16	120	2	2
LB	***NA'IL DIGGS***			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	14	39	0	0
CB	**RONALD BARTELL**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	66	0	0
FS	**OSHIOMOGHO ATOGWE**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	12	74	1	2
SS	**JAMES BUTLER**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	13	69	0	3
CB	**JUSTIN KING**			
	G	TACKLES	SACKS	INT
	15	36	0	0

SPECIAL TEAMS

P	**DONNIE JONES**			
	PUNTS	AVG	NET	
	90	46.8	41.7	
K	**JOSH BROWN**			
	FG	XP	POINTS	
	19–24	16–16	73	
PR	**DANNY AMENDOLA**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	31	11.6	0	
KR	**DANNY AMENDOLA**			
	RET	AVG	TD	
	66	24.5	0	

New acquisition
(R) Rookie: College stats
TTD: Total touchdowns

Take Me Fishing presents Recasting a Sports Star

NO END IN SIGHT

After losing touch with a boyhood passion, Justin Tuck is more devoted than ever to the joys of fishing

Justin Tuck has come a long way since he got involved with sports in Kellyton, Ala. (pop. 223). And not just in football, the game he plays for a living.

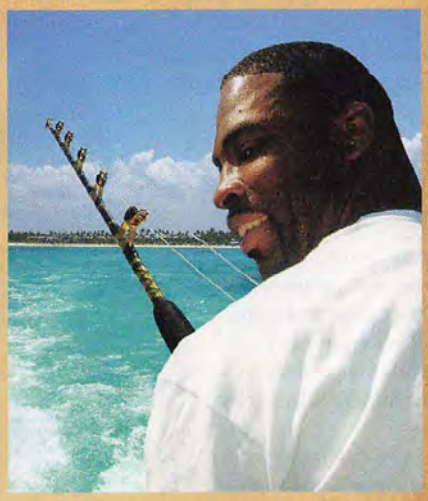
Tuck, who starts at defensive end for the New York Giants and was a key player in the team's Super Bowl–winning season two years ago, is both a blocker's nightmare and a die-hard angler. He's gone from fishing for catfish around his boyhood home to plying the waters off Hawaii for marlin—a fringe benefit that came with his trip to the 2009 Pro Bowl in Honolulu.

Tuck had plenty of early exposure to fishing, thanks to his family and the bountiful waters near his home. "There are a lot of ponds down there," he says of central Alabama. "Within a two-mile radius I could take you to 15." That's where Tuck learned to fish for cats and largemouth bass with his father, grandfather and several uncles.

"We'd fish all day," he adds. "We caught some big ones, I'll tell you that!"

But Tuck's excellence on the football field and the resulting demands on his time came at a price: He didn't get out on the water as much as he would have liked to in high school or while spending his college years in South Bend, Ind., at Notre Dame. That's beginning to change, though. "The last five years, I've had some teammates who are really passionate about fishing," Tuck says, "and they got me out on the water a lot more."

Recently, he and fellow defensive end Dave Tollefson fished a bass lake in upstate New York during a break from training camp. The two Giants lived up to their team's name—Tuck caught a five-pound smallmouth bass while his partner hooked a seven-pound largemouth.



HAVE ROD, WILL TRAVEL: TUCK FIRST LEARNED TO FISH ON LAKES NEAR HIS ALABAMA HOME. HE'S EXPANDED HIS RANGE FROM HAWAII TO UPSTATE NEW YORK.

"The last five years, I've had some teammates who are really passionate about fishing," Tuck says, "and they got me out on the water a lot more."

Playing for New York also means Tuck gets to try his hand at some new species. "Being on the Atlantic, I really got into striped bass fishing in the last couple of years," he says. And next spring he's heading to the north country to fish for walleye. "It'll be my first time fishing in freshwater for anything other than bass or catfish."

Tuck has a message for kids who've never gone fishing: Do it. "It's something you'll have for the rest of your life," he says. And it's never too late to pick up a rod and reel. "I got [serious about] the sport a little later than I wanted to," he says, "but there's nothing like it. Getting out there on the water is one of the most relaxing things you can do." ●

©2010 TIME INC.



IF WE KNEW ANY MORE ABOUT FISHING, WE'D HAVE GILLS.

From choosing the right lure to finding the best trolling motor for your boat, we'll help you be prepared. Learn, plan and equip for a memorable day on the water.

TAKEMEFISHING™.org


SPORT FISH
RESTORATION

The Vault



I-BACK ATTACK
Rozier rushed for only 71 yards against Penn State, but he finished the season with 2,148 and 29 touchdowns.

Photograph by
HEINZ KLUETMEIER



EXCERPT | September 5, 1983

Big Red Machine

Nebraska overwhelmed Penn State on opening day

With a powerful offensive line and a backfield that included quarterback Turner Gill and All-America I-back Mike Rozier, the Cornhuskers were touted as one of the country's top teams. Jack McCallum reported for SI.

This time Nebraska didn't take any chances. The last time Nebraska played Penn State—on Sept. 25, 1982—the Cornhuskers blew a three-point lead in the final four seconds and suffered a bitter 27–24 defeat. The Nittany Lions went on to win the national championship. On Monday night, though, in the inaugural Kickoff Classic at Giants Stadium in the New Jersey Meadowlands, Nebraska gave Penn State not the slightest opportunity to stage late-game heroics. Or, for that matter, early or mid-game heroics. Unleashing a formidable offensive attack coolly led by quarterback Turner Gill, the Huskers rolled up 500 yards on the way to a 44–6 romp that was even more one-sided than the score.

With Penn State behind him—far, far behind—Nebraska coach Tom Osborne noted afterward that a team usually improves the most between its first and second games of the season. Yikes. Heaven help Wyoming, the next victim on the Huskers' schedule.

Gill turned down a baseball offer this summer from the New York Yankees—he's a shortstop—to direct Osborne's option offense. The senior completed 11 of 14 passes for 158 yards and one touchdown, ran for 53 yards and a score, and constantly befuddled the Lions with his option trickery. Penn State would play the pass—and Gill would run. Penn State would play the run—and Gill would pass.

The Huskers finished 12–0 and Rozier won the Heisman, but they lost the national title to Miami in a memorable Orange Bowl, falling 31–30.

Cover Shots

Big Men on Campus



1961
Terry Baker
was both a quarterback and a point guard at Oregon State. In '62 he won the Heisman Trophy, led the Beavers to the Final Four and was named SI's Sportsman of the Year.

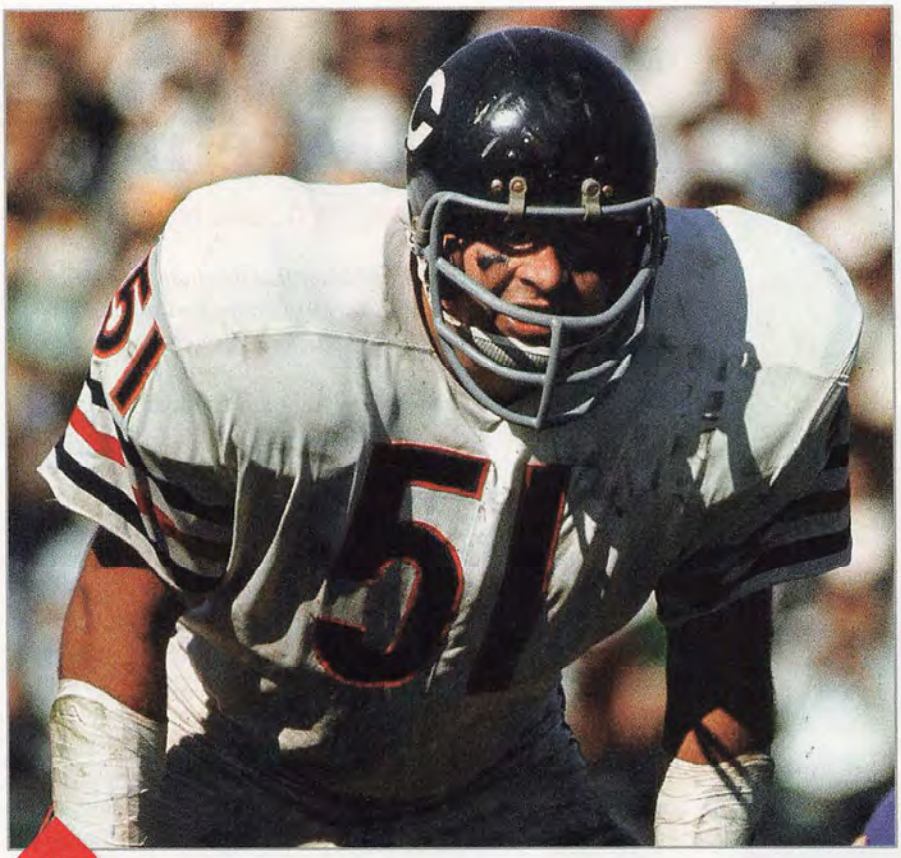


1975
Rick Slager
quarterbacked Notre Dame to an 8–3 record in coach Dan Devine's first season—which included senior walk-on Daniel (Rudy) Ruettiger's sack in a win over Georgia Tech.



1991
Desmond Howard
scored six touchdowns in Michigan's first two games—highlighted by the diving winner in a 24–14 win over Notre Dame. He went on to earn the Heisman Trophy.

FROM LEFT: HY PESKIN; HEINZ KLUETMEIER; DUANE BURLESON/AP



Editor's Choice

Numbers Game

This week SI.com takes a look at the alltime greatest NFL players at each number, from 00 to 99

Our decision was based on a combination of the player's impact on the game, statistics and the team's success when the player wore that number. Wearing number 51 for nine seasons with the Bears, **Dick Butkus** *(above)* appeared in eight Pro Bowls and remains the standard by which all middle linebackers are judged.



#7 John Elway



#19 Johnny Unitas



#20 Barry Sanders



#34 Walter Payton

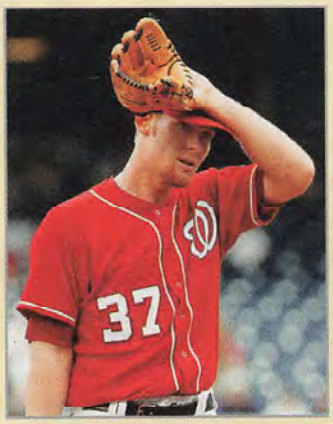


#80 Jerry Rice



#92 Reggie White

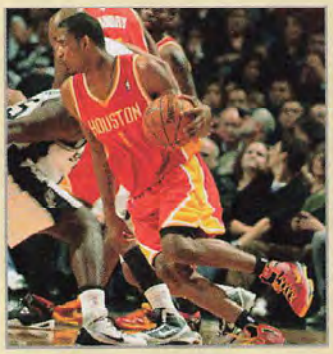
Featured Stories



ALL TOO FAMILIAR
Stephen Strasburg's injury troubles are an ongoing reality for pitchers
By Joe Posnanski



UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS
An 18-game schedule will mean more injuries for players like **Joseph Addai**
By Jeff Pearlman



LOUD AND CLEAR
Hornets' acquisition of **Trevor Ariza** sends a strong message to Chris Paul
By Lee Jenkins

JOHN G. ZIMMERMAN/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (BUTKUS); ANN HEISENFELT/AP (STRASBURG); JOHN BIEVER (ADDAI); GREG NELSON (ARIZA); ANDY HAYT (WHITE); PETER READ MILLER (RICE, ELWAY); JERRY WACHTER (PAYTON); JAMES DRAKE (UNITAS); JOHN ACONO (SANDERS)

THE PETER KING CHALLENGE

Presented By:
HYUNDAI *Sonata Turbo*



Do You Have What It Takes to Dethrone the King?

Pick the pro football winners each week as you go head-to-head with your friends and SI senior football writer Peter King. Set up groups, leave comments and track your picks live on game day while competing for a great competition prize and the Grand prize.

Visit **www.si.com/pkchallenge**
and sign up for your opportunity to WIN!



ONE GRAND PRIZE
A six days/five night trip
for the winner and one guest
to Las Vegas, NV

17 WEEKLY PRIZES
MP3 Player

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER. THE PETER KING CHALLENGE IS OPEN TO LEGAL RESIDENTS OF THE 48 CONTIGUOUS UNITED STATES OR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, AGE 21 OR OLDER AT TIME OF ENTRY. VOID IN ALASKA, HAWAII, PUERTO RICO, U.S. TERRITORIES AND POSSESSIONS AND WHERE PROHIBITED BY LAW. TO ENTER AND VIEW COMPLETE OFFICIAL RULES WHICH GOVERN THIS CONTEST, VISIT WWW.SI.COM/PKCHALLENGE. CONTEST BEGINS AT 3:00 A.M. EASTERN TIME ("ET") ON 8/26/10 AND ENDS AT 11:59 P.M. ET ON 1/1/11. SPONSORED BY: SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, A DIVISION OF TIME INC., 1271 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, NY 10020.

The NFL's Growing Pains

by SELENA ROBERTS



This couldn't be the right room. It was only a clinic door, but when he swung it open, Wesley Walls passed through a portal to his future. He stood among bingo-hall sharks with their sock-hop memories, their early-bird dinner plans and their new ceramic hips. Just 41 in December 2007—four years removed from a career as a Pro Bowl tight end—Walls found himself stretching with the oldies after hip-replacement surgery at a facility in Charlotte. "I was doing physical therapy with some of my parents' friends," he told me six months after his surgery. "It was like, Hey, you're that Walls kid, right? I thought, Man, I am too young to be in here. This can't be happening, not this soon."

Fans will only notice the effects of an 18-game season if the quality of play deteriorates. When does the quality of players' lives enter the equation?

The math is cruel. Studies estimate that an NFL player will lose an average of one to three years of life expectancy for every year he spends in the league. Is 40 the new 65 for pro football veterans? Many recently retired players find themselves rehabbing in the company of geriatrics because of the damage inflicted by a 16-game season. "We think we can play forever," says Rich Gannon, the 2002 MVP who played 17 years at quarterback and suffers from chronic pain in his knees and neck, among other areas. "But the thing that's really dawned on me is that I'm 44 years old and I've already had two knee surgeries, two shoulder surgeries and I broke my neck in 2004. I really felt like when I retired I was out of the woods, but I've had all kinds of issues."

Imagine the wear, tear and, ultimately, despair of a season lasting 18 games. As the 2010 season kicks off next week, and negotiations intensify over a new collective-bargaining agreement for '11, the owners are pushing a proposal to enhance their bottom line: Steal two preseason games (which starters often sit out) and tack them on to the regular-season calendar. Theoretically, the Jets' clunky preseason loss against the Redskins last Friday at the New Meadowlands Stadium—on an August evening fit for a clambake—would have been the season opener. "You take away two junk games and add two real ones, it would take a physical toll," says New York defensive end Jason Taylor, a 13-year veteran. Jets player rep Tony Richardson, a fullback with 15 years experience, adds, "That's putting two years on a career like mine. I might not be standing here right now. As players, we have a lot of research and data to gather first."

Does it matter what the players surmise when commissioner Roger Goodell, in his almighty Oz voice, keeps saying, "The fans have spoken"? Clearly, fans detest preseason games, but the owners have selective hearing—fans also loathe seat licenses, long lines at stadium restrooms and TV blackouts. Fans experience the game, not its repercussions. They cheer, tailgate and slap on their walls life-sized Fathead images of a player in action, frozen in time. It's a peel-and-stick appreciation of virtuosity in a disposable form. Greatness comes and goes. Fans will only notice the side effects of an 18-game season if the quality of play deteriorates. Exactly when does the quality of players' lives enter the equation?

There has been plenty of heated debate about the state of health care for NFL players and alumni, but the discussion often centers on concussions. That's a worthy concern—reports on the damage to the brains of dead players are beyond disturbing—but a lot of alumni leave the game with their wits about them. Their bodies, however, are as ravaged as voodoo dolls'. A sharp pain here. An odd numbness there. It is this everyday physical and spiritual anguish that in some cases leads to depression, as experts have pointed out. Now add two more games. "You're probably talking 120 extra plays, 120 extra collisions over the course of a season," says Gannon. The collisions in today's game are more violent than they were in 1978, when the seasons went from 14 to 16 games. Players are bigger and faster, yet the suits of armor are still plastic and foam rubber.

We talk about bloody Sundays but not bruised Tuesdays. Numb it and forget it. Denial is the silent deal an NFL player makes to survive the pounding of 16-game seasons, even though his retired body may scream back at him one day. Walls thought he had sciatica when X-rays revealed the stunning truth: He needed a hip replacement. He had undergone 11 surgeries—mostly scope jobs—during his days with four NFL teams, but Walls had never been so vulnerable as he was after receiving a new hip. "I couldn't put my socks on," he said. "I couldn't tie my shoes. I couldn't put my pants on. I couldn't get out of bed to eat without my wife's help." Walls paused. "It gave me a glimpse: Is this what it's going to be?"

Is age acceleration preventable? No, but that doesn't mean the pedal has to be floored, either. "We're not automobiles," Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis told reporters last week, explaining his stance against an extended season even if roster size and compensation are increased. "We're not machines." The league constantly tweaks its violence monitoring as a nod to player safety. But adding games to the regular season makes all the hit policing—the league has recently placed warning posters about concussions in every locker room—seem like peel-and-stick window dressing. It's a Fathead approach to health. Extend a season, shorten a lifespan. Nothing catches up to an NFL player faster than age. □

JOHN BURGESS

Talk Back
If you want to comment on Point After or suggest a topic, send an e-mail to PointAfter@si.timeinc.com

Sports Illustrated

FREE JACKET

Pick Your Team!

It's yours with your paid subscription.



YES! Send me the FREE NFL TEAM PERFORMER JACKET of my choice with my paid subscription to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (1 year/56 issues for $1.29 each).

Name _____ (please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

To order faster, go to: subscribetoSI.com
Or call 1-800-234-9494

☐ Bill me in full.
☐ Bill me in 4 monthly installments.

SIGVJE9

Plus sales tax where applicable. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED publishes 5 double issues. Each counts as 2 of 56 issues in an annual subscription. SI may also publish occasional extra issues. Your first issue will arrive 1-3 weeks from receipt of order. Allow 4-8 weeks for delivery of free gift. If unavailable, it may be replaced by an item of greater or equal value.

10ISIIAA

Choose your size: ■ L ■ XL ■ XXL

Choose your team:

- ■ Bears (CB)
- ■ Bengals (BG)
- ■ Bills (BB)
- ■ Broncos (DB)
- ■ Browns (BR)
- ■ Buccaneers (TB)
- ■ Cardinals (AC)
- ■ Chargers (SD)
- ■ Chiefs (KC)
- ■ Colts (IC)
- ■ Cowboys (DC)
- ■ Dolphins (MD)
- ■ Eagles (PE)
- ■ Falcons (AF)
- ■ 49ers (SF)
- ■ Giants (NY)
- ■ Jaguars (JJ)
- ■ Jets (JT)
- ■ Lions (DL)
- ■ Packers (GB)
- ■ Panthers (CP)
- ■ Patriots (NE)
- ■ Raiders (OR)
- ■ Rams (SL)
- ■ Ravens (RV)
- ■ Redskins (WR)
- ■ Saints (NO)
- ■ Seahawks (SS)
- ■ Steelers (PS)
- ■ Texans (HT)
- ■ Titans (TT)
- ■ Vikings (MV)



FREE NFL TEAM PERFORMER JACKET
with paid order

NO POSTAGE
NECESSARY
IF MAILED
IN THE
UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 22 TAMPA FL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

Sports Illustrated®

PO BOX 61290
TAMPA FL 33661-1290

Sports Illustrated

TELL US YOUR TEAM

Choose your size:

- ☐ L
- ☐ XL
- ☐ XXL

- ☐ Bears (CB)
- ☐ Bengals (BG)
- ☐ Bills (BB)
- ☐ Broncos (DB)
- ☐ Browns (BR)
- ☐ Buccaneers (TB)
- ☐ Cardinals (AC)
- ☐ Chargers (SD)
- ☐ Chiefs (KC)
- ☐ Colts (IC)
- ☐ Cowboys (DC)
- ☐ Dolphins (MD)
- ☐ Eagles (PE)
- ☐ Falcons (AF)
- ☐ 49ers (SF)
- ☐ Giants (NY)
- ☐ Jaguars (JJ)
- ☐ Jets (JT)
- ☐ Lions (DL)
- ☐ Packers (GB)
- ☐ Panthers (CP)
- ☐ Patriots (NE)
- ☐ Raiders (OR)
- ☐ Rams (SL)
- ☐ Ravens (RV)
- ☐ Redskins (WR)
- ☐ Saints (NO)
- ☐ Seahawks (SS)
- ☐ Steelers (PS)
- ☐ Texans (HT)
- ☐ Titans (TT)
- ☐ Vikings (MV)



Subscribe to SI and get the exclusive NFL Team Performer Jacket FREE with your paid order

You pick the team! You pick your size!

Send 56 issues (1 year) for $1.29 an issue plus the jacket of my choice to:

Name (Please print)

Address

City State Zip

☐ Bill me in full. ☐ Bill me in 4 monthly installments.

Order online at: subscribetosi.com
or call 1-800-234-9494

10ISIIAB

SIGVJD2

Plus sales tax where applicable. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED publishes 5 double issues. Each counts as 2 of 56 issues in an annual subscription. SI may also publish occasional extra issues. Offer valid in U.S. only. Your first issue will arrive 1-3 weeks from receipt of order. Allow 4-8 weeks for delivery of free gift. If unavailable, it may be replaced by an item of greater or equal value.



FREE NFL TEAM PERFORMER JACKET
with paid order

NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST-CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 22 TAMPA FL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

Sports Illustrated®
PO BOX 61290
TAMPA FL 33661-1290

DESIGNED TO INTRIGUE

Peer deep into the inner workings of a Bulova mechanical and you'll find something amazing – a watch without batteries or electricity, powered by the energy of a coiled spring and kept in motion by a complex, self-winding system perpetuated by your body's natural movement. The result is a design that's as beautiful inside as it is outside.



BVA – SERIES 105

BULOVA

SINCE 1875

DESIGNED TO BE NOTICED

Kohl's
kohls.com



Introducing FaceTime video calling. Smile.

iPhone 4

© 2010 Apple Inc. All rights reserved. 1-800-MY-APPLE or www.apple.com. Wireless service plan required. FaceTime requires iPhone 4 and Wi-Fi.